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'We shall not forgive'

President Mubarak, in a Labour Day speech, called the Israeli assault against Lebanon an unforgivable sin

Ceasefire now

FOREIGN Minister Amr Moussa reaffirmed yesterday Egypt's stand that the two-week Israeli aggression against Lebanon could only harm the Middle East peace process and lead to instability in the volatile region, reports Samah Abdallah from the Greek capital.

Moussa told reporters in Athens after a meeting with his Greek counterpart that an immediate ceasefire should be worked out to stop Israeli attacks against civilians in Lebanon. He said Israel should also respect UN Security Council Resolution 425, which calls for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from occupied Lebanese territory.

Nuclear vote

REACTING to statements made by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres on Tuesday in which he indirectly conceded that Israel possessed nuclear weapons, Egyptian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohamed Adel El-Safti renewed Egypt's call that Israel must sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

El-Safti told Al-Ahram that Egypt believed comprehensive peace could not be established in the region as long as one country possessed weapons of mass destruction while others were deprived of this privilege.

The deputy minister wondered whether the timing of Peres's statements was related to his election campaign. Peres, said El-Safti, may have been trying to win more votes by telling the Israeli public that, as the pioneer in creating Israel's nuclear arsenal in the late 1950s, he would continue to assure the country's supremacy in this field.

Oil talks off

IRAQ and the United Nations decided yesterday to suspend their current round of oil-for-food talks, following pressure from the US and Britain to stiffen the language of a tentative accord which had been drafted by the UN and approved by Iraq.

The US and Britain wanted to limit Iraq's role in distributing the food and medicine that would have been purchased with oil revenue. Iraq's chief negotiator accused US and Britain of "massacring" the accord. A UN spokesman said Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz and UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali agreed by telephone that the political will existed to overcome current difficulties and that a fourth round of talks would start next month on a date to be decided on later.

Gutter bomb

A SMALL bomb exploded yesterday outside the Israeli Interior Ministry's office in East Jerusalem. A police spokesman said a car was slightly damaged, but no injuries occurred as the office was closed at the time for Israel's Independence Day.

The explosive had been placed in a gutter next to a car. Israeli officials said the bombing was related to a series of terrorist attacks that have rocked Israel in the last few months.

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President Hosni Mubarak, affirming unshakable faith that peace will eventually triumph, described the Israeli attacks against Lebanon as a "sin that can neither be forgiven nor justified."

Mubarak declared solidarity with Lebanon, as it acted to defend its sovereignty and interests, and said Egypt attempted to persuade the Israeli government that its policy was wrong and posed a grave threat to future Arab-Israeli co-existence.

In an 80-minute speech marking both Labour Day and Israel's 1982 withdrawal from the Sinai desert, Mubarak said yesterday: "The bloody events witnessed by brotherly Lebanon during the past days are a flagrant example of the transgressions that are in complete opposition to the spirit of peace. They bring back to mind the climate of war, destruction and bloodshed."

He added: "This wide-scale aggression, many of whose victims were civilians, women and children, is a sin that can neither be forgiven nor justified in any way. It is a violation of the code of conduct which should govern the actions of all parties in this phase of peace-making."

Mubarak said the Egyptian people and

government "opposed this new Israeli invasion of a sister Arab state and invited the countries that have the special responsibility of shepherding the peace, as well as all peace-loving forces, to declare their rejection of these Israeli actions, which are beyond all limits."

Egypt, he added, had also played an active role within the Arab League and the UN Security Council to "confront" the Israeli actions and attempt to persuade the Israeli government that its "policy is erroneous, will have grave consequences and will inflict great harm on future Arab-Israeli co-existence."

Mubarak affirmed to "the brotherly Lebanese people that we stand with them in this ordeal and support their action to defend their sovereignty and interests. We are confident that this creative people will be able to surmount this tragedy, as it has surmounted destructive dangers in the recent past."

At the same time, he expressed confidence that "a comprehensive peace will be achieved, regardless of the difficulties, and justice will eventually triumph over all the forces of suppression and domination. No body will be able to stop the movement of

the wheel of peace... Nobody will be able to shackle the future with the fetters of the past... Our commitment to a comprehensive peace will remain unshaken — a comprehensive peace in return for complete withdrawal."

Before his speech, Mubarak called for a moment of silence to mourn a police major-general and three other policemen who were killed on Tuesday while raiding an Islamist militant hideout near Mallawi in the southern governorate of El-Minya. Two militants were also killed in the shootout and police sources said the men might have been involved in last Thursday's attack on a Pyramids Road hotel, in which 18 Greek tourists were killed.

Alluding to the militants, who are bent on establishing an Islamic state, Mubarak said: "The people were not deceived by their false religious pretensions. Although hypocrites attempted to justify their crimes, the people realised from the very beginning that they were facing hired groups working for foreign forces that do not wish to see stability or progress for Egypt... The aims of these groups have been exposed and the scope and dimensions of the conspiracy has become

clear to the whole world."

Mubarak said that "the major segments of these groups have collapsed and most of their leaders and members have fallen... And yet we are witnessing desperate attempts by the remnants of these groups to revive their activities and hit the interests of the toiling sons of the people."

Vowing to continue along the path of democracy, Mubarak said: "We respect freedom of expression, but we reject attempts at deception and the distortion of facts... We respect the freedom of the press but it should be responsible and factual... We esteem partisan action and the role of the opposition, but we reject political auctioneering and suspect alliances with illegal forces."

Mubarak also extended assurances to workers that mass layoffs would not be allowed under the government's privatisation programme.

And on the issue of privatisation: "I have repeatedly stressed that preserving the rights of workers is one of the primary responsibilities of the government... And yet there are those who are trying to sow anxiety among workers by spreading false rumours about the possibility of mass layoffs once

some public sector companies are put up for sale.

"But privatisation in Egypt is governed by numerous rules, including Egyptian sovereignty over its land and decisions, and commitment to the public interest and the rights of owners and workers alike," he said. Other rules, Mubarak added, are that any company put up for sale should not change the nature of its activity and that the new owners should not lay off any of the workers.

"We are also aware of the dangers that might affect the independence of our national economy," he said. "Although we welcome foreign capital, we calculate matters thoroughly and study each case on its merits because there are projects of a strategic nature, related to the national interest, that should remain part of the public business sector."

Mubarak said that encouraging private enterprise was imperative if the economic growth rate was to be stepped up and extended to all parts of Egypt and if new job opportunities were to be created. "Without a greater role for the private sector in development, it will be difficult to achieve an increase in production," he said.

Troops storm across Suez Canal

IN A NIGHT-time exercise, the first of its kind, a mechanised infantry division crossed the Suez Canal south of Ismailia to repulse a simulated offensive by a "hostile" state east of the waterway, reports Galal Nassar. The crossing in pitch darkness Tuesday night was completed in a record 70 minutes.

The scenario of the war games featured an attack by a "hostile" state which dropped paratroopers east of the Suez Canal. The command of the second army responded by ordering the mechanised division to cross the waterway to confront the attacking forces.

A platoon of amphibious reconnaissance vehicles spearheaded the crossing forces. Tanks, artillery pieces and anti-aircraft missiles, moving on a pontoon bridge, followed. But at this point, the "enemy" scrambled its warplanes which bombed and damaged the bridge.

The division's commander brought in 160-ton floating craft which transported M1-A1 and M-60 tanks, 120mm mortars, tow anti-tank missiles and various types of anti-aircraft missiles and artillery to the eastern bank. The crossing was shrouded in black smoke for protection against the attacking warplanes.

In the meantime, anti-aircraft missiles were being fired from the western bank, forcing the "enemy" warplanes to withdraw. Egyptian F-16 jetfighters then buzzed into the skies to provide the crossing forces with added protection.

Heavy artillery fired shells from the western bank to clear the way for the counter-offensive.

Military sources said the crossing was staged under the assumption that the "enemy" might use incendiary bombs or weapons of mass destruction. The crossing forces were provided with the necessary protection equipment.

Lt. Gen. Magdi Hetta, chief-of-staff of the armed forces, who watched the exercise, ordered all lights put off so that the crossing would be made under "real battle" conditions. The crossing tanks and vehicles were only allowed to use their head-lights.

Extolling the forces' performance, Hetta said the second army "demonstrated a combat readiness that is the greatest in the world. Crossing a water barrier in the darkness of the night is the highest achievement."

Hetta said the crossing proved that the training plans for the armed forces were "proceeding in the right direction which makes Egypt a power that is highly respected by the other states of the region."

Maj. Gen. Ali Maher, commander of the second army, said night-time combat is "the salient feature of future wars". Recalling the events of the 1973 war, which began with Egyptian troops storming across the canal, Maher said the crossing forces demonstrated equal skill in the exercise but used more advanced crossing equipment.



PEACE AT POINT ZERO: Since the adoption of a multi-party system 20 years ago, rarely has parliament been as united as in this week's session on the Israeli assault against Lebanon, with (l-r) the leftist Tagammu's Khaled Mohieddin, the liberal Wafd's Yassin Serageddin, the Nasserists' Samah Ashour, the ruling NDP's Kamal El-Shazli and other MPs joining hands to express the nation's outrage at Israel's brutal aggression

Israel opts for genocide

As the Israeli attacks on Lebanon turned into a war against civilians, Warren Christopher visited Damascus and Chitaura to negotiate a ceasefire

Israeli warplanes and artillery cut off roads and water supplies for thousands of villagers in South Lebanon yesterday, in what UN peacekeepers said had become a war mainly against civilians.

"They are starving people out, making them thirsty," said Mikael Lindvall, spokesman for the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which has been trying to get aid to villagers trapped by Israel's offensive against Hezbollah guerrillas. "Mainly, it's become a war against the civilian population."

As the attacks raged for the 14th consecutive day, US Secretary of State Warren Christopher arrived in Damascus from Israel and headed into talks with President Hafez Al-Assad, a day after Assad had made himself "not available" for an earlier scheduled meeting. "I hope the parties come to a very prompt resolution," Christopher said on arrival in Damascus.

UNIFIL sources said Israeli warplanes closed three roads in a hilly region near Tyre, preventing aid convoys from reaching the estimated 5,000 to 6,000 Lebanese civilians still there — a tenth of the population living in the area before Israel widened everyone to flee.

Rockets fired by the Israeli jets narrowly missed a convoy of UN peacekeepers taking food and supplies to besieged villagers and evacuating people southeast of Tyre. The rockets destroyed a water main near the village of Joussa, also southeast of Tyre, cutting off service to 23 villages and to Irish, Finnish and Ghanaian UN positions. On Tuesday, Israeli jets struck a water tank, depriving another 22 villages of water. "Lots of people in the area will be without water soon," Lindvall predicted.

Israeli jets twice bombed a UN armoured personnel carrier (APC), badly damaging the vehicle but causing no casualties. The APC was thrown into the air by a bomb which exploded five metres from it and was shaken five minutes later by a second bomb exploding 10 metres away, UNIFIL spokesman Tamar Goksel said.

The vehicle's five-man Finnish crew were unharmed, but UN personnel were angered by the attack. "UNIFIL has made an extremely serious protest to the Israelis," reported Goksel. "This looked like

a deliberate attack on a clearly marked UN APC."

Israeli gunboats, meanwhile, enforced a blockade on the coastal highway linking South Lebanon with the rest of the country. The warships fired intermittently at any vehicle driving south on the 80-kilometre road, police said.

UN positions east and southeast of Tyre, where guerrillas are active, have been caught in the Israel-Hezbollah fighting. Israeli shellfire struck a UN base in the village of Qana last Thursday, killing over 100 Lebanese refugees and wounding more than 100 who had sought shelter with the peacekeepers.

UN officers said Israeli warplanes staged 55 bombing raids and artillery positions fired 2,300 rounds on 60 villages clustered around Tyre and the inland market town of Nabatieh from dusk on Tuesday to dawn on Wednesday. In the same period, Hezbollah guerrillas fired 60 Katyusha rockets toward northern Israel, slightly wounding two people.

The Israeli air attacks intensified yesterday, with warplanes and helicopter gunships launching at least 25 more raids in just over two hours. According to police reports, they struck junctions, destroyed a bridge and fired at water installations in the Tyre and Nabatieh regions, further damaging Lebanon's infrastructure.

Lebanese security sources reported an Israeli troop buildup along the border. The sources said at least 50 Merkava tanks and 100 armoured personnel carriers were positioned along the border adjoining the Israeli-occupied "security zone". Some of the armour has been in place in the region for about a week, ready to intervene against the guerrillas.

Christopher met with Assad for four-and-a-half hours, in an effort to arrange a ceasefire, and then drove to Chitaura to talk with Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri and Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri. The town is located 45 kilometres east of Beirut in the Bekaa Valley.

It was Christopher's first face-to-face meeting with Lebanese officials since he started a shuttle between Israel and Syria last Saturday in search of an agreement on a durable truce. His efforts received a double setback on

Tuesday. Assad refused to meet him and then a trip to Lebanon was cancelled because of concern for the secretary of state's safety.

In Washington, President Bill Clinton met with President Elias Hrawi of Lebanon to discuss prospects for a ceasefire.

"I hope we're quite close. I've had some encouraging news that I can't announce now," Clinton said during a photo session with Hrawi in the oval office.

Clinton, meanwhile, declared that he and all Americans were "profoundly concerned" with the violence, and announced that he would provide emergency aid to civilians in southern Lebanon.

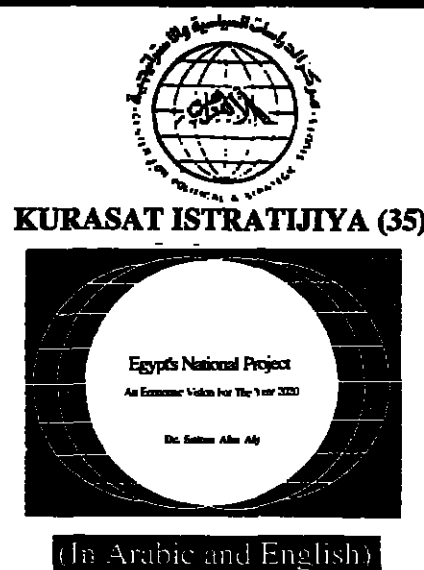
Clinton rejected suggestions that the US had not been even-handed in the Middle East by failing to condemn the deployment of Israeli troops in South Lebanon as an illegal occupation. "The United States supports the United Nations resolutions on this," he asserted. "We don't believe there should be any foreign troops in Lebanon."

In an apparent allusion to the presence of Syrian forces in Lebanon, Clinton said: "If Lebanon were completely sovereign, free and independent none of this would have happened."

Hrawi took his country's plight to the UN on Tuesday, calling on the General Assembly to put a halt to Israeli attacks as a "test for the conscience of our era."

"How could the world accept the killing of Lebanese civilians... while this same world hastens to denounce... the explosion of a bus in Israel," Hrawi said, speaking at the beginning of a two-day debate on the fighting in Lebanon.

Since the hostilities began, 151 people have been killed, most of them Lebanese civilians. About 320 have been wounded on both sides. Some 500,000 Lebanese have been displaced and thousands of northern Israelis fled their homes. Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader, said in a television interview on Tuesday that guerrilla attacks against the Israelis in southern Lebanon would continue even if a ceasefire was signed. He rejected the US peace proposal, saying Washington could not be a "mediator" in the current conflict because of its support for Israel.



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Shootout in sugar-cane plantation

FOUR members of the security forces, including a major-general, were killed along with two Islamist militants in a shootout on Tuesday in a sugar-cane plantation near the troubled town of Mallawi in the southern Governorate of El-Minya, an Interior Ministry statement said.

The three-hour shootout erupted when security forces raided a militant hideout as part of a nationwide search for five terrorists who attacked the Europa Hotel along Pyramids Road in Giza last Thursday, killing 18 Greek tourists.

A security source said the dead militants were members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya and that an investigation was underway to determine whether they had taken part in the Europa attack.

The officers killed in the shootout were named as Maj. Gen. Gamal Fayek, commander of the Central Security Forces in El-Minya, his brother, Lt. Col. Magdi Fayek and Lt. Reda Wali. An unnamed police constable was also killed.

The security source said police had established the locations of several hideouts used by the militants near the village of El-Ashmouniyyin. At 7am on Tuesday, large numbers of central security, anti-terrorism and special operations forces began combing the area. They came under a hail of automatic rifle fire from a militant hideout inside a sugar-cane plantation.

The attacking forces fired back and the three-hour shootout began.

After the firing subsided, the security forces stormed the hideout. Inside, they found the bodies of two militants, two automatic rifles, a pistol, several explosive charges and a large quantity of ammunition. Documents were also found listing the names of targeted police officers and public personalities.

The source said there is a possibility that one of the dead militants was Salama Abdel-Hakim Radwan, described as a notorious terrorist who had been involved in several attacks against police forces and civilians in El-Minya in the past.

Whether the two militants had been part of the gang that attacked the Europa Hotel remains an open question. But the source recalled that three militants had killed a taxi-driver last Thursday afternoon near Maghagha, also in El-Minya governorate. These militants, who might have taken part in the Europa attack, had asked the driver to take them to Mallawi and killed him when he took a wrong route. They commandeered another car but abandoned it and escaped when it approached a police checkpoint.

In Tuesday's shootout, two civilian residents of the area were also wounded by the militants' fire; two police lieutenants and two constables were also injured when their car overturned.

The source said security forces were continuing to comb the area in search of escaped militants.

Slaughter on Pyramids Road

Security forces continue a nationwide hunt for five terrorists who sprayed a Pyramids Road hotel with gunfire last Thursday, killing 18 tourists

Around 6.45am last Thursday, a group of Greek tourists finished their breakfast at the coffeshop of the Europa Hotel on the Pyramids Road. They walked through the hotel lobby to wait for a bus which was to take them on a tour of the Mediterranean city of Alexandria.

As they waited outside the hotel, four terrorists who had been lurking outside the hotel opened fire with automatic weapons, killing 18 Greeks, including 14 women, and wounding 17 others. The four, plus a fifth terrorist who acted as a lookout and protected the group's retreat from the scene, escaped in a commandeered microbus. The driver of another microbus who attempted to give chase had to stop after the terrorists brandished an automatic rifle and threatened to shoot him.

Two days later, the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya claimed responsibility for the attack. In a statement they said the attack had been intended to target Israeli tourists to avenge the Israeli attacks against Lebanon. Reports in the Arabic-language press said there were some 10 Israeli Arabs inside the hotel at the time.

According to eye-witness accounts, the terrorists had commandeered a microbus, forcing the driver to take them to the Europa Hotel at gunpoint, after throwing out a lone passenger. One of the terrorists then boarded a public bus, forcing the driver to park it in the middle of the Pyramids Road to block traffic and facilitate their escape after the attack.

"They knocked us all down. They were firing. It was chaos. I fell down. I lost my teeth. I lost my glasses," Ioannis Monalakis, who was injured in the attack, told Athens' Skai radio station.

The attack left the eight-storey hotel riddled with dozens of bullet holes, its front steps covered with pools of blood. Sandwiches, water bottles and shoes were strewn around the area. Guests wept.

Some witnesses said the gunmen first attacked the bus which was to take the tourists to Alexandria, then, realising it was empty, redirected their fire to the people standing beside it.

"Suddenly we saw people falling," said bell-boy Seyed Zaghloul. "If the bus had not been there, it would have been worse." The bus windows were shattered by the bullets.

Greece sent civilian and military planes to carry the dead and wounded back to Athens. But five of the seriously injured remained hospitalised in Cairo.

The tourists had visited holy sites in Jerusalem for Orthodox Easter and then toured monasteries in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. They had been due to return home last Saturday.

Immediate measures were taken to replace those in top positions in Giza's security hierarchy. The security chief of Giza governorate, his assistant and the commander of tourism police were all replaced. Maj. Gen. Ahmed Homam Attia was named as the new security chief for Giza, Maj. Gen. Ahmed Shafie as his assistant, and Maj. Gen. Gamal Saleh as the new tourist police commander.

Thirteen police officers of various ranks were

suspended and will be put on military trial, presumably for negligence of duty. "The security forces are fighting a ferocious battle against the forces of evil and terrorism," said Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi. "This battle requires total vigilance on the part of the security forces to protect their own lives, the lives of innocent citizens, and the lives of Egypt's guests as well as Egypt's economy, security and stability. Therefore, there can be no negligence, because the price could be the lives of innocents. We take harsh measures to deal with any suspected negligence of duty because the security forces should be always on the alert until terrorism is uprooted."

Police threw a massive dragnet around the slum areas surrounding the Pyramids Road, through which the gunmen had reportedly escaped. Checkpoints were set up, houses were raided and dozens of suspects were rounded up.

The search was later expanded to include other parts of Egypt, particularly the southern provinces where, police believe, the attackers might have taken refuge. This theory gained credence after a taxi driver was killed last Thursday afternoon by three militants who had demanded that he take them to Mallawi in the Governorate of El-Minya. Police believe the killers might have taken part in the hotel attack earlier in the day.

Police were also searching for the white Volkswagen microbus which the gunmen used to reach the Europa Hotel and, later, to make their getaway.

Maj. Gen. Raouf El-Manawi, the Interior Ministry's spokesman, told a group of Greek reporters that security authorities had "acquired important information that will unravel the mysteries of the attack."

He said investigators were "pursuing all possibilities, including the possibility that the attack was a response to Israeli attacks against southern Lebanon." But Al-Manawi ruled out any Hezbollah presence in Egypt.

According to reports in the Arabic-language press, the hotel's security men did not fire back because they were not armed. Moreover, it was pointed out that their responsibility is confined to securing the hotel from the inside. Unlike five-star hotels, which are under heavy police guard, the Europa Hotel had not been provided with police protection. However, following the attack, the Interior Ministry decided to intensify guard and security precautions at all hotels and tourist sites.

In published press interviews, the hotel's manager, Ahmed Habib, said he had applied for western licences for his security men but the application had been turned down "because the law does not allow it".

Asked whether the hotel was favoured by Israeli tourists, Habib said the occupancy rate of Israelis never exceeded 10 per cent, adding that "most of them are Israeli Arabs anyway".

On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa travelled to Athens for a one-day visit to offer condolences to the Greek government. The two nations are bound together by years of warm friendship.

Tourism shaken but undamaged

While cancellations are reported as limited, the impact of the terrorist slaughter at the Europa Hotel on tourism is still unclear. Rehab Saad found hoteliers and travel agents still hopeful that the season is not lost

"It is too early to forecast the effect of this terrorist act on the numbers of tourists coming to this country. However, preliminary indications show that cancellations are very limited and this in itself is a good sign." This is how Tourism Minister Mamdouh El-Beltagi summed up the situation in the tourism market after 18 Greek tourists were killed by terrorist gunmen outside the Europa Hotel. The situation, he added, still needed continuous monitoring.

Those in the tourism industry gave varied reports on the initial impact of the attack on their businesses. Nagwa Emad, public relations director of Sonesta Hotels and Nile Cruises, said that while there had been no cancellations at Sonesta's beach resorts, there had been some withdrawals from Nile cruises. She felt that losses had been minimised by the media coverage, which highlighted the fact that Israelis, and not Greeks, were the intended targets of the massacre.

May Kamil of the Mövenpick agreed with El-Beltagi that it was too early to get a clear picture of the situation. However, she reported that some guests had left immediately on hearing the news. "I do believe that there will be some cancellations in Cairo," she said. "But I don't think the Red Sea will be affected."

She pointed out that, irrespective of the attack, the number of tourists is bound to drop with the approach of the off-season summer period.

There won't be so many tourists in summer, but I hope that the coming winter season will be good. We cannot make any calculations now because most of the foreign travel agents put their winter programmes on hold until winter approaches," she said.

Jerabim El-Iraqi of Jolley's Tours said that the cancellation rate was varying widely between different markets. In the Greek market, cancellations had reached 70 per cent; the cancellation rate from Spain was between 60 and 70 per cent;

French cancellations saw-sawed between 10 and 15 per cent; but cancellations from Eastern Europe did not exceed four per cent. However, with occupancy rates averaging 100 per cent in recent months, El-Iraqi argued that the industry would not face major problems.

Abu Bakr El-Shorbagi of 3A Tours was more negative. "This is a hard blow," he said. "Even if there are no cancellations, numbers are dropping. Instead of having a group of 50 people, we now get 30 and so on."

To avert anticipated losses, most travel agencies are intensifying their marketing campaigns abroad to persuade foreign operators that the situation is under control. One of them invited a travel agency owner to visit this country to show him that it is "safe and secure".

Additional police vehicles have been assigned to guard hotels following the attack. "We have to demonstrate to the world that security precautions at hotels have been doubled," Emad

commented, adding that Sonesta's own security men were being provided with extra training.

Meanwhile, a Ministry of Tourism report said that the Egyptian government had had great success in eliminating major terrorist networks. The report added that travel advice issued by some governments did not pay enough attention to some important facts:

— the statement issued by Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya asserted that the attack was directed at Israelis as an act of retaliation for the aggressions against Lebanon. The statement thus made it clear that the attack did not target tourism as such;

— the Egyptian Federation of Tourist Chambers has declared that it will continue to cooperate with Israel and promote tourism in the Middle East;

— new security precautions have been introduced and additional police guards posted at all hotels and tourist sites.

A local manufacturer is providing passenger cars with armour plating, and it may be available to the public soon. Nevine Khalil investigates

Filling in the holes

As the motorcade made its way from Addis Ababa airport to the conference site under a burning African sun, nine terrorists unleashed a hail of automatic rifle fire. As the shots bounced around the car, the driver, oblivious of a booby-trapped vehicle ahead, turned around and headed back towards the airport, carrying his VIP passenger to safety. The target, President Hosni Mubarak, came through unharmed from the assassination attempt of 26 June.

In addition to the instant heroics of the president's security men who disembarked quickly and fired back, it was Mubarak's bullet-proof car which saved his life. A bullet in the roof, one fired at the side window, more at the door and one at the front window, were stopped by the armour plating.

The lives of other Egyptians are also at risk, even in Cairo, with prominent officials, ministers and thinkers named on militants' death lists. A number of "targeted" figures have purchased bullet-proof cars, and the Interior Ministry has supplied its forces with powerful armoured four-wheelers, which are used to combat terrorism in Upper Egypt. The vehicles are assembled at the Kader factory of the Arab Organisation for Industrialisation (AOI), cutting costs by a third while maintaining international standards — prices range from \$155,000 to \$175,000.

Field Marshal Salah Halabi, head of AOI, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Ministry has already tested the four-wheel armoured cars in the field. "They proved to be very safe and efficient," he reported.

Some of the vehicles purchased by the ministry provide security escort for tourist buses, establishing a public presence following the buses, and giving chase to terrorists if they attack. Had they been available last Thursday, when 18 Greek tourists were killed by terrorists on Pyramids Road, bloodshed could perhaps have been avoided. Unfortunately the vehicles had been employed elsewhere.

Kader uses American armour-plating technology to produce the bullet-proof four-wheeler, and is currently working on a smaller, saloon prototype which is expected to be completed before the end of this year. According to some estimates, the smallest car that can be armoured is a Peugeot 605 or Mercedes 260, because a strong engine is needed. Also, keeping the outer, and to some extent, inner composition of the armoured car unchanged is important, "so that it is not identified as carrying a VIP," as Kader Chairman Abdel-Hamid Wasfi explained.

Production lines currently assemble Mercedes G-320s (Level 5 armour) and Jeep Cherokees (Level 4), reinforcing their body and glass. The Interior Ministry has purchased over 50 of them, and negotiations are in progress to buy more. The American armour-plating technology has already been tested in other countries, like Peru and Colombia, where it has been used in the war against narcotics.

The distinguishing feature of this technology, according to Alberto Santillana from the technology suppliers, is that it is light, easily repairable and has proved very durable in the field.

Because of the extra 900kg or so of armour-plating, the car must have reinforced front and rear axles, suspension, door hinges, a 150-200 horsepower engine and central locking. If the windows are to be open, which in fact defies the purpose of security, the sliding window system should be reinforced, otherwise air-conditioning must be installed for ventilation. The carmaker is responsible for equipping the vehicle with the heavy structure, while Kader reinforces the body and the glass.

Another option, which would allow the car to leave the scene of an attack quickly are run-flat tyres — two sets of inner and outer tyres, separated by a steel ring which stops the bullet from puncturing the inner tyre. This allows the vehicle to move at a speed of about 50km per hour for a distance of 80km before it comes to a halt. There are other types of run-flats, including one where the air cavities inside the tyre are separated so that if one is punctured the rest continue working.



Women demand a brighter future

The Second National Conference on Women debated ways of improving woman's status in society. Rania Khalil attended

Activists, scholars and officials came together for a two-day Second National Conference on Women, inaugurated on Sunday by Mrs Suzanne Mubarak at Cairo University.

The First National Conference on Women was held in 1994, when participants concentrated on defining the obstacles against women's full participation in the making of the future. This time round, solutions for those problems were suggested.

Focusing on "women, development and society's advancement," the participants agreed that only by enhancing women's political, economic and legal rights could we ensure a better future for both women and society. Efforts should be redoubled to give women equal access to jobs and education. Women should be supported by a fair legal system, and, in the political sphere, should be encouraged to join political parties and vote in elections.

Highlighting the role of women in politics, Mrs Mubarak, in her inaugural address, said: "I am calling on all political parties to earmark a fixed percentage of their electoral lists for women candidates. And I do not think that finding good women candidates should be more difficult than finding good

men candidates." On the economy and the effects of privatisation on women, Mrs Mubarak noted that "it is important that women should not be forced to pay too high a price for economic reform measures". However, she emphasised that reform and violation of women's economic rights did not necessarily go hand-in-hand. Education and the promotion of women's literacy also figured high on the conference's agenda. Participating researchers agreed that literacy was a major handicap to the advancement of both women and society as a whole. Recent statistics, they reported, showed that 66 per cent of women in urban areas and 77 per cent of women in rural areas could not read or write. In addition, girls were far more likely to drop out of school than boys.

Given that this high rate of women's illiteracy was due in part to the attitude of conservative fathers who either prevented their daughters from schooling or forced them to leave school to enter early marriages, one participant suggested that legislators should impose a penalty on fathers who violated the education law. One particularly thorny topic tackled was the personal status law, considered by many to be unjust because of the gender inequalities it imposes in such matters as marriage, child custody and divorce.

The marriage contract came in for particular criticism from actress Amina Rizk, a member of the Shura Council. "All contracts, with the exception of the marriage contract, observe the interests of both the parties," she observed tersely, recalling the controversy that had tipped in the bud a new marriage contract designed to grant women and men equal rights in marriage.

Participants agreed that the personal status law should be revised and all articles exposing women to injustice or humiliation be modified.

The recommendations of the conference, read out by Amina El-Gundi, secretary-general of the National Council of Motherhood and Childhood, stressed that the conference's objectives should be incorporated into the next five-year development plan, due to begin in 1997. "I would like to assert that improving women's conditions is a prerequisite for sustainable development and political and social stability," El-Gundi told the concluding session.

In her closing speech, Mrs Mubarak promised that "the recommendations of the Second National Conference on Women will find their way to the cabinet... to make sure that they are translated into tangible programmes."

Defence notice to Egyptian expats

FOUR Defence Ministry delegations are travelling to Europe and the United States in May to straighten out the legal status of scores of male expatriates who have not performed their obligatory military service, reports Ghalal Nassar.

Maj. Gen. Osman Shahin, chief of the Armed Forces' Organisation and Administration Authority, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the first delegation will operate from the Egyptian Embassy in Rome between 5-11 May, the second in London between 12-16 May, the third in Bonn between 17-21 May and the fourth in Washington between 22-26 May.

Male expatriates over 30 who have not performed their military service can present themselves to these delegations, submitting their papers, including identity and military conscription cards. After paying a \$2,185 fine, each will receive a certificate testifying that his "conscription status" has been settled for good.

Those who do not have the necessary official papers should call at the nearest Egyptian Embassy to initiate action to acquire them. If applicants have not obtained the necessary papers before the arrival of the delegations, they will be provided, on payment of the fine, with a letter, valid for six months, allowing them to return home to obtain the necessary official papers.

Only those who have passed the age of 30 can benefit from this arrangement. Young men under that age should return home to perform their military service, Shahin said. If they are enrolled in schools or universities which are recognised in Egypt, they should submit papers to the Egyptian Embassy in the country where they reside proving their status so that their conscription may be delayed. Those enrolled in below university level institutes are eligible for postponement until the age of 22 or 26 and those in universities until the age of 28.

Delegations from the Defence Ministry travelled to Arab countries last year in a similar effort.

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Partnership

A commandite partnership has been formed by a registered contract in the court of north Cairo governorate district in 18/4/96 - no. 2081/96, between Magdi El Manawehi, responsible partner and Zoulaya Ivan Ivanovitch Ukraine, Mykhaylo Yunko and Grigori M. Gueliti. The company's brand is "Phosphatco exports" based in Cairo with a capital of L.E. 30000 partners' share is 45%. Management and signature rights for the first responsible partner.

It was a week of anger, grief, sit-in protests, rallies and marches, with Egyptians from across the political spectrum expressing outrage at the Israeli atrocities in Lebanon. Egypt's 17-year-old peace with Israel has never been colder, Mona El-Nahas reports

Peace at point zero

The Israeli flag was burned. Calls were made to halt the normalisation of relations with Israel and for the revival of the joint Arab defence treaty. And prayers were offered for Lebanon's martyrs. This is how Egyptians from all walks of life gave vent to their fury, grief and indignation at the seemingly unending Israeli attacks against Lebanon.

The government, the People's Assembly and human rights organisations issued statements of condemnation, and opposition parties and professional syndicates organised protest rallies and sit-in strikes.

"No party stands to gain from the human catastrophe which Israel has inflicted on Lebanon," said Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. "Any gain is bound to be tactical and not strategic."

Moussa said the Israeli attacks had been met with massive Arab indignation and had "a negative impact, that could be long-range, on the peace process and its credibility."

The attacks, Moussa said, "have made the work of the peace-makers more difficult... Peace is the responsibility of all parties. Peace is not an Israeli peace, but an Arab-Israeli peace." He affirmed Egypt's support for Lebanon and rejection of the Israeli attacks.

Opposition parties, in a joint statement, declared that tomorrow, Friday, would be a day of solidarity with Lebanon and that prayers would be offered "for the martyrs of Zionist treachery" in all mosques and churches. They demanded the revival of the joint Arab defence pact and that the US Embassy be informed of their condemnation and protest.

"The chairman of political parties and popular forces, horrified by the Israeli aggression on brotherly Lebanon, declare their total condemnation and categorical rejection of the crimes committed by Israel against the Lebanese people and the entire Arab nation, as well as the blockade and starvation imposed on the Palestinians," the statement said. It described the Israeli actions as "state terrorism that is outlawed by the UN charter."

Hailing the "steadfastness of the Syrian and Lebanese peoples in the face of the strong pressures that seek to impose surrender on them," the political parties "affirmed the right of the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples, as well as the Arab peoples in the Occupied Territories, to resist the foreign occupation by all methods, including armed struggle." The parties also urged Arab governments to "activate the joint Arab defence pact with the aim of stopping the continuing Israeli aggression on Lebanese soil."

The political parties urged all Arabs to "resist all attempts at normalising [relations] with the Zionist entity, maintain the economic and touristic boycott and refrain from providing the Israeli economy and military machine with petroleum."

Dr Rifaa El-Said, secretary-general of the leftist Tagammu Party, said the Israeli attacks were meant to impose peace on the Arabs on Israel's terms and to curtail the Arabs' regional role.

Yassin Serageldin, chief of the Wafd Party's parliamentary group, urged the government to reconsider its "patient policy" in addressing the latest developments. The Syrian and Lebanese ambassadors and representatives of the Arab League and the PLO were invited to a seminar which the Wafd Party organised last night to discuss the Lebanese situation.

Adel Hussein, secretary-general of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, said the Israeli attacks should have been expected. "From the very beginning, we warned against Israel's intentions, asserting that peace with Israel cannot last as long as Israel insists on humiliating the Arabs and denying them their legitimate rights," Hussein said. "The time has come for the Arabs to wake up, realise what Israel truly stands for and reconsider their policy."

The Labour Party organised a protest rally on 16 April. A second rally was held on Monday at the headquarters of the Nasserist Democratic Party.

A group of women members of opposition parties demonstrated on Saturday opposite the downtown headquarters of the Arab League, burned the Israeli flag and shouted slogans of protest and condemnation. Dressed in mourning black, they also submitted a memorandum to the League, demanding an end to all types of normalisation with Israel, the recall of the Egyptian ambassador in Tel Aviv and the urgent convening of an Arab summit. The one-hour protest was joined by dozens of university students and Lebanese women residing in this country.

The protesters planned a four-hour sit-in for yesterday at the offices of the Tagammu Party and a 10-hour hunger strike on Saturday outside the Arab League.

The Doctors Syndicate urged Egyptian and Arab doctors to stage a five-minute work stoppage at noon on Monday to show solidarity with the Lebanese people. The syndicate issued a statement praising the courageous stand of the Lebanese government and describing Lebanese resistance as legitimate. The statement said the massacre committed by Israel in the southern village of Qana was proof "that it was Israel which planted terrorism in the Middle East and that its intentions should not be trusted."

Dr Hamdi El-Sayed, the syndicate's chairman, said a ceasefire "will be nothing but tactics to absorb the world's angry reaction. It does not mean that Israel's intentions are good, for Israel's only aim is to destroy the Arabs."

"El-Sayed said the Arabs' "only hope, in facing the Israeli aggression, is to stand like one man, settle all their disputes and develop their countries." He hailed the acts of resistance launched by Hezbollah, declaring that anyone who did not lend a helping hand to Hezbollah should be considered a traitor.

An emergency session of the Arab Lawyers Federation that opened on Saturday condemned the Israeli attacks as a flagrant violation of international legality and Lebanese sovereignty. The two-day session, attended by representatives of the Egyptian

Writers Union and the Arab Journalists' Federation, called for Arab and international pressure on Israel to terminate its attacks. A telegram was sent to UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali demanding the unconditional implementation of Security Council Resolution 425 that calls for Israel's withdrawal from the so-called security zone in southern Lebanon.

Salaheddin Hafez, secretary-general of the Arab Journalists' Federation, said the Israeli aggression was not directed only at the Lebanese people, but "aims at uprooting the Arab civilization." He said the Egyptian Press Syndicate was the first professional union to oppose normalisation in 1978, "and our position has not changed in any way". Sarwat Abaza, head of the Egyptian Writers Union, condemned what he described as "the barbaric acts inflicted on a brotherly Arab country".

Last Friday, hundreds of Muslims prayed at Al-Azhar Mosque for the rest of the souls of the Lebanese martyrs. Officiating at the prayers, Dr Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar, asserted that "supporting our brothers in Lebanon is the duty of every Muslim. He who does not care for the affairs of other Muslims cannot be considered as one of them."

Muslims have a religious duty to defend their lands and souls and also have the right to use all possible methods to restore rights which have been usurped, Tantawi added.

On Sunday, 10 students from Cairo University demonstrated outside the nearby Israeli Embassy and burned the Israeli flag before being dispersed by security forces.

The following day, large numbers of students marched on the university campus, shouting slogans against Israel's "bloody and ugly" record and describing it as the Arabs' "number one enemy". They also set fire to the Israeli and American flags.

Similar protests were staged by leftist students at the campus of Ain Shams University. The protesters urged the government to stop normalising relations with Israel and to take a more decisive position.

At the American University in Cairo (AUC), students staged a sit-in strike on Monday, and tore up an Israeli flag. Speeches were delivered condemning the Israeli attacks and the "biased" American position, and urging Arab governments and peoples to support Lebanon.

The People's Assembly, in Monday's session, condemned the Israeli attacks and demanded an immediate end to "these crimes". The Assembly's members stood in silence for one minute to mourn the Lebanese martyrs.

"Israel killed women and children and attacked ambulances and the UN force zone," Speaker Fathi Sorour said. "These crimes have deeply moved peoples all around the world and proved that Israel has violated the Geneva convention [on the protection of civilians]."

On Tuesday, Sorour announced a freeze on plans for a parliamentary delegation to visit Israel. "Parliamentary delegations re-

flect the voices of peoples and nations, and the Egyptian people are angry, so the representatives of the people cannot travel to Israel to speak with people who have chosen the language of war," Sorour said, adding: "The day they start speaking the language of peace, I will allow the parliamentary delegation to go."

The Arab Organisation for Human Rights, in a statement, expressed great disappointment at the American position, which it described as completely biased towards Israel. The organisation urged the world community which, a few weeks earlier, had taken part in the Sharm El-Sheikh Peacemakers Summit, to shoulder its responsibility and bring to an end "the Israeli terrorism which has been unleashed against Lebanon". The organisation declared unlimited support for the Lebanese people's struggle for their legitimate rights, and demanded the implementation of Security Council Resolution 425.

The organisation said the Israeli attacks had reduced the chances of a just and comprehensive peace in the region. "It has become clear that the current peace is not real," said the organisation's secretary-general, Mohamed Fayek. "Under occupation, terrorism, injustice and lack of security, peace can never prevail."

A statement by Egyptian Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) appealed to all Egyptians to halt all forms of normalisation of relations with Israel. It also urged President Hosni Mubarak to suspend diplomatic relations with Israel and declare a national state of mourning for the martyrs of Lebanon.

"The murder of women and children is called self-defence; the humiliation of the Arabs, the occupation of their land and their subjugation to American-Israeli hegemony is called the peace process," the statement said. "The United Nations stands with hands tied, in spite of the massacres committed within its zones of sanctuary; the walls of children in Nabatiya and Tyre provoke no reply."

The statement appealed to world governments and the United Nations "to act decisively to bring an immediate halt to the savage Israeli aggression against Lebanon and to effect an unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territories in accordance with Security Council Resolution 425."

Cairo University's teaching staff also demanded in a statement that Egyptian-Israeli relations be frozen, the Israeli ambassador expelled and the size of diplomatic representation between Egypt and Israel reduced. The statement urged that a state of general mobilisation be declared "in case of further developments" and asked why the Arab armies had not acted to defend Lebanon as they had defended Kuwait in 1991.

"If some Arab forces declared readiness to defend Lebanon, invoking the Arab defence pact, the situation would have been completely different," maintained Badr Eddin Ghazi, chairman of the staff club.

'Unite or perish'

SPEAKERS at a conference organised by the Afro-Asian Peoples Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO) on Monday pointed an accusing finger at the United States for acting the Israeli attacks against Lebanon. They demanded a settlement of inter-Arab disputes and a revival of Arab unity, with one speaker warning that the alternative was the death of the Arabs. Participants in the one-day conference included delegates from Lebanon and Syria.

"The United States alone is responsible for what is happening in Lebanon because it gave Israel the green light to launch its brutal Grapes of Wrath operations," said Dr Murad Ghalib, the organisation's chairman. "On every occasion, the US president holds Hezbollah responsible and asserts that Israel has every right to confront terrorism."

For Ghalib, the atrocities committed by Israel in Lebanon are only the last page in a long, bloody record. "The Zionists previously committed horrible crimes in Sabra, Shatila and Deir Yassin and massacred hundreds of Egyptians in 1967," he said.

The solution rested with the Arabs, he asserted, and peace could only be achieved "through a long and continuous struggle". He urged the necessity of comprehensive Arab development and a collective Arab confrontation.

"The Arab world has powerful minds and angry feelings but unfortunately the Arab will is lacking," he said.

Bishop Moussa, representing Pope Shenouda III of the Coptic Orthodox Church, made a moving appeal for Arab unity. "The Arab nation is at a very critical and miserable stage," he said. "The prevailing disputes and conflicts have led to a state of disintegration and indifference in most Arab governments, which are not even capable of holding a mini-summit."

Bishop Moussa added: "The Arabs are Israel's main target. By enforcing its expansionist policy, Israel managed to occupy Palestine, the Golan Heights, southern Lebanon and other Arab territories. The latest events have shown Israel to be a big liar. Her talk of peace turned out to be an illusion and Peres emerged as a hawk." Bishop Moussa concluded by warning that the Arabs have two options: unity or death.

Karim Murowa, head of the Lebanese delegation, vowed that his country would continue to struggle, despite the continuing Israeli attacks. "It is our right to defend our territory and resist occupation," he said.

"Nothing on earth could stop us from doing this," Israel, by claiming that its attacks were aimed at combating terrorism, had used the resolutions of the Sharm El-Sheikh Peacemakers Summit as a pretext to justify its aggression against Lebanon, Murowa said. "But it is Israel and its patron, the United States, which planted terrorism in the region."

In his view, the Israeli attacks were aimed at reviving sectarian strife in Lebanon and driving a wedge between Syria and Lebanon to break up their united front in the peace negotiations. "But thank God, Israel has failed to achieve any of its contemptible aims."

Murowa called for an emergency Arab summit to deal with the Lebanon situation, declaring that the Arabs should settle their differences and stand as one.

The organisation's deputy chairman, Ahmed Al-Asaad, who headed the Syrian delegation, warned that other Arab countries might be the target of "similar barbaric attacks" in the future. Alluding to the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Israel, Al-Asaad maintained that the Israeli aggression was politically motivated. Israel, he said, "wants a peace that serves her own interests at the expense of Arab rights".

Al-Asaad urged all Arabs as well as civil institutions in the Arab world to show solidarity with Lebanon.



Students outraged

THOUSANDS of angry Cairo University students continued for the third day Wednesday fiery demonstrations to protest the Israeli assault on Lebanon. Students from different faculties chanted slogans supporting the Lebanese resistance and condemned the position of the US and Arab governments.

Streets leading to the university were cordoned off by security men Monday as students marched peacefully out of the university campus to declare their condemnation of the Israeli aggression. Police protected demonstrators as they marched in the university's nearby streets. Both Israeli and American flags were burnt during the demonstration.

On Tuesday, students confined their demonstration to the Cairo University campus. Following the demonstrations, university students representing different political orientations held a large rally and issued a final statement. The statement called for an immediate severance of Egyptian-Israeli relations and the abrogation of the peace treaty unilaterally by Egypt on the grounds of Israel's violation of its provisions.

The students also called for expelling the Israeli ambassador to Egypt, summoning the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv and stopping all forms of normalisation with Israel. Members of the university teaching staff joined the students in prayers performed to commemorate the Lebanese martyrs who fell victim to the Israeli aggression.

Parliament united in anger

PEOPLE'S Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour's decision to cancel the visit of an Egyptian parliamentary delegation to Israel was greeted with rapturous applause in the People's Assembly on Tuesday. The decision was in response to Israel's Grapes of Wrath operation against Lebanon.

"Since Israel has followed the path of war and set the language of peace aside, no parliamentary delegation will go to Israel," declared the speaker.

State Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Kamal El-Shazli, said that the Israeli aggression has revived a nightmare of war in the region. "We condemn the aggression and call upon Israel to stop military operations which ultimately will threaten Israeli security. Egypt has called upon the UN Security Council to issue a resolution which would condemn the Israeli acts and oblige Israel to follow the civilized path of negotiations to settle disputes."

Ahmed Abu Zeid, representative of the National Dem-

ocratic Party (NDP), said: "The brutal aggression against Lebanon violates all international laws and principles, as it aims at destroying vital establishments and killing innocent civilians. The hidden target of such operations, which Israel has named 'Grapes of Wrath', is very clear. It is very sad that the aim of this brutal aggression, backed by the Israeli opposition, is to satisfy Israeli voters." Abu Zeid charged that Israel aims at draining Arab resources and destroying Arab development ambitions.

He called for action to stop the Israeli aggression immediately, applying Security Council Resolution 425, and paying compensation to Lebanon. "At the same time, we are against any disarmament of the Lebanese resistance, for people have every right to defend their territories," said Abu Zeid.

Khaled Mohieddin, leader of the leftist Tagammu Party stated: "The aggression against Lebanon and the blockade imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip made us feel

humiliated and helpless."

Mohieddin called for "tough measures to show Israel that we condemn its hostile acts. The least we can do is to stop normalisation with Israel."

Ragab Hemeda of the Liberal Party said: "We should know that all Arab countries are targets of Israel, which plans to establish an expansionist project and wage war against the Arabs. The Arabs should remember the Hezbollah massacre and the crimes committed in Sabra, Shatila and Deir Yassin". Hemeda appealed to Egypt to call for the revival of the Arab Joint Defence Agreement.

Nasserist Sameh Ashour called for freezing relations with Israel: "We are not in a position which allows us to enter into a war with Israel, and at the same time we are not capable of achieving a just and comprehensive peace."

Tolba Oweida, head of the Arab Affairs Committee, urged Arabs to unite to fight Israel's growing domination in the region.

Journalists burn Israeli flag

JOURNALISTS staged a symbolic two-hour sit-in strike at their syndicate's headquarters Tuesday to express their solidarity with Lebanon. Replicas of the Israeli flag were burnt during the strike, and journalists chanted slogans condemning the Israeli aggression, hailing Hezbollah resistance and criticising the weak Arab reaction.

Following the strike, around 100 journalists attended a symposium organised by the syndicate's Arab affairs committee. Hisham Dimashkieh, the Lebanese Ambassador to Cairo, was one of the speakers. Dimashkieh expressed his disappointment at "the reaction of the Arabs who did nothing more than issue statements and repeat hollow slogans".

The Lebanese Ambassador said that the recent events in Lebanon united Lebanese society. He added that resistance is Lebanon's legitimate right in the continuing struggle for liberation. Dimashkieh called upon the international community to demand that Israel withdraw from the occupied territories in southern Lebanon. "Before this, any talk about peace will be meaningless. We should not accept a peace based upon a Zionist concept," the ambassador insisted.

Ahmed Youssef, a professor of political science in Cairo University and head of the Arab Research Centre, called upon the Arabs to withdraw from the peace process. "We do not need a damned settlement. It is Israel which needs a settlement with the Arabs to realise its expansionist aims in the region."

The journalists issued a statement which will be submitted to the Arab League Secretary-General. In the statement, journalists called upon the Arab League to convene an emergency Arab summit. The statement also asked Arab countries to halt normalisation with Israel and cancel any agreement signed with it. The statement slammed the pro-Israeli US attitude and the UN's failure to protect Lebanese refugees.



Adel (l) hands over his donation to Ambassador Dimashkieh



Chahine, Lutfi and El-Safi express solidarity with the victims in Lebanon

Artists express solidarity

HORRIFIED by the reports of Israeli massacres in south Lebanon and the forced migration of nearly half a million Lebanese from the south, top Egyptian artists and intellectuals as well as ordinary citizens descended on the Lebanese embassy in Cairo to donate money, clothes and blankets.

Egypt's top male cinema star, Adel Imam, travelled from Alexandria especially to participate with his son Rami and daughter Sarah. "I came to express my condemnation of what is being inflicted upon children and women," Imam said.

Cinema director Youssef Chahine also visited the embassy, along with actor Khaled Nabawi and scriptwriter Khaled Youssef. "What is happening in South Lebanon is a clear indication that there can be no normalisation [of relations] with Israel," Chahine said.

Veteran Lebanese singer Wadie El-Safi, who recently got Egyptian citizenship, said that there have been many songs about south

Lebanon "which has paid the price with the blood of its innocent children. Whenever I see a mutilated child, I weep and imagine him or her to be my own grandchild."

Cinema star Nadia Lutfi commented that the Arab nation is indivisible and that "there has to be a unified stand against Israeli terrorism." Singer-actor Samir Sabri called upon all artists to take a public stance against what is taking place in Lebanon.

Painter Ahmed Shihm and Lebanese ambassador Hisham Dimashkieh discussed holding an auction next week of 15 of Shihm's paintings for the benefit of the Qana village victims.

Other donors included students, housewives and businessmen. The embassy will continue to receive donations until Friday.

As Israel's assault on Lebanon is transformed from an operation against Hezbollah into a genocidal war against the south Lebanese population, correspondents' reports (below) and analysts' conclusions (opposite page) suggest Grapes of Wrath has gone sour

Tides of war

The Qana massacre and other Israeli atrocities against Lebanese civilians have turned international public opinion against Israel, reports Zeina Khodr from Beirut

It required gruesome television images of charred women and children before world leaders decided to exert efforts to halt Israel's onslaught against Lebanon.

Despite international appeals and diplomatic efforts to broker a ceasefire, Israel's air, land and naval offensive against Lebanon continues unabated. The onslaught, which began on 11 April, has left at least 160 people dead and over 300 wounded. It has caused wide-scale destruction and forced almost half a million people to flee their homes. After two weeks of fighting, diplomatic efforts are now in full swing in the Middle East and the United Nations headquarters in New York.

Diplomatic activity surged after Israel's massacre at Qana, southeast of the port city of Tyre. The world condemned the bloodbath and called for an end to the violence. But the United States, which has tacitly supported Israel's offensive, stopped short of condemnation.

According to political analysts, Lebanon and its ally Syria want any agreement to halt hostilities to be accompanied by some sort of political settlement in the south.

"Negotiators are now forced to address issues on the back burner since Syrian-Israeli peace talks were frozen by Tel Aviv two months ago," Nizar Hamzeh, chairman of the political science department at the American University in Beirut said. "A ceasefire is not the only thing on the table. A number of issues need to be negotiated before a ceasefire can be brokered. Lebanon has to reach some sort of settlement for the South, whether or not it includes UN Resolution 425, which calls for Israel's unconditional withdrawal from South Lebanon."

Political commentators said the Lebanese government, which is trying to cope with the displacement of close to half a million people from South Lebanon, rejected an immediate ceasefire without a political deal since the refugees would not return home with the confidence that peace will prevail. Many have suggested that Israel might, for example, delay talks on a political deal until after elections

there next month.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, who is trying to broker a deal to stop the fighting, reportedly abandoned his aim of securing a ceasefire before a political settlement was reached.

"This is the result of the Qana massacre. The world was shocked at the carnage. Syria has the upper hand in negotiations. It has strong European — particularly French — and Russian backing," a political analyst commented.

"It is in Israel's favour at this point to reach a ceasefire," he said. "Prime Minister Shimon Peres is in trouble. Operation Grapes of Wrath has not achieved its military or political objectives and the US is trying to help Israel. Peres faces elections soon. Israel has not achieved its declared aim to crush Hezbollah — the movement spearheading a guerrilla war to drive Israeli forces from a zone it occupies in South Lebanon."

Hezbollah continues to retaliate against Israel's attacks by launching rockets into northern Israel. It has become more powerful, with its popularity soaring in the country and Israel has not been able to hit it. The Qana massacre as well as other atrocities against civilians have turned international public opinion against Israel.

When, last Thursday, Israeli shells slammed into a UN base in Qana, more than 100 Lebanese civilians, mostly women and children, were killed and at least another 100 were wounded. The UN said the shells hit the base after Hezbollah fired rockets from a position 300 or 400 metres away, a charge Hezbollah denies. Israel apologised, describing it as a human error and an accident. But UN soldiers claimed that Israeli artillery was too accurate to make that kind of error and that the base was hit on purpose. Moreover, the *Jerusalem Post*, Israel's main English-language daily, said that the Israeli army was capable of distinguishing between something 200 metres away and something 400 metres away.

It was not the first time Israel has targeted UN forces in the South. It has repeatedly fired bombs near UN bases and

convoys since the onslaught began. The attacks have at times prevented UN relief convoys from reaching civilians stranded in their villages.

Israeli gunboats continue to cut off South Lebanon from Beirut by constantly shelling the main coastal road. The aim is to prevent humanitarian aid from reaching those trapped in the South.

While peace envoys from the US, France, Iran, the European Union and Russia flocked to Damascus and Tel Aviv to discuss proposals to end the offensive, some Lebanese here felt Lebanon had been excluded from the negotiations, although it was the target of Israel's military onslaught.

Israel and its closest ally, Washington, have made it clear that they consider the American proposal, which bows to Israeli demands, as the basis for a ceasefire. Lebanon and Syria are against this proposal because it calls for disarming Hezbollah and banning the group from attacking Israeli troops in the occupied zone in the south without an Israeli commitment to comply with Security Council Resolution 425. Syria, Lebanon and Iran have expressed support for France's initiative, which calls for commitments by Israel, Lebanon and Hezbollah not to attack civilian populations in each other's countries.

"Why should Syria disarm Hezbollah now when it is one of its cards in peace negotiations with Israel," an analyst asked. "Anyway, Syria does not have to make any concessions at this stage. Israel had insisted until the Qana massacre that its offensive would continue until Hezbollah met Israeli demands for comprehensive security arrangements that would stop the group fighting Israeli troops in the South." But analysts observe that Peres might just settle for a quick ceasefire to extricate himself from a quagmire in Lebanon.

Analysts add that the agreement that is expected to emerge will be based on the 1993 Katyusha Understanding, with the condition that it will be between Israel and the Lebanese government and not between Israel and Hezbollah.



Shimon Peres

by Bahgory Peres, unlike Rabin, appears outwardly calm. At first glance he appears to have an open, if stern face. The folds underneath the eyes and around the cheeks, lips, chin and neck, are all rounded. I wanted the dark eyebrows, set in the middle of the grey hair, to determine the direction of his gaze. These elements are all wrapped up in hair that appears artificial, drawing attention to hawkish eyes that betray an ability to make decisive, even destructive, decisions. Whenever I come across Peres' face in print or on the television it resembles nothing more than a big question mark.



America's wrong play

US failure to denounce Israel's latest massacre provoked the fury of Arab diplomats in Washington. Hoda Tawfik reports from the American capital

Egypt's UN envoy Nabil El-Arabi worked hard last week to obtain a Security Council resolution condemning Israel, but the motion was defeated in what was described as "back-room dealing".

Arab diplomats in Washington condemned US "blind support" for Israel's latest onslaught on Lebanon and expressed disbelief when Washington failed to explicitly criticise the Jewish state's killing of 102 civilians in the southern village of Qana.

"After a disgraceful silence it [the United States] found itself obliged to step in to end the fighting," said Egyptian ambassador to Washington Ahmed Maher El-Sayed, who has been playing a major role in the Arab diplomatic efforts to highlight the suffering of the Lebanese people, as well as the American "double standard" in the conflict.

US Secretary of State Warren Christopher rushed to the Middle East in search of a deal to end Israel's attack on Lebanon, but Washington's priority appears to be a face-saving formula accord for its close ally, which would also please Jewish voters ahead of the November American presidential elections.

The foreign ministers of Russia and several West European powers converged on Damascus seeking a ceasefire deal but Christopher, clearly echoing Israel's stand, said the US was the only competent power to broker an accord.

"It is difficult to have multiple channels, it is difficult to have multiple drafts," Christopher said on ABC television, commenting on ceasefire proposals by other world powers which Arab diplomats said were more acceptable, as they were less biased in favour of Israel.

Arab diplomats here say Christopher is seeking a deal which would not put Israel in the wrong for launching the two-week blitz, while guaranteeing its security against Hezbollah Katyusha rockets. They say he is seeking a formula even stronger than the so-called "Katyusha Understanding" which he helped forge in 1993.

Ambassador Sayed told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that US silence when the onslaught began "appeared as if America gave Israel the green light" to destroy Hezbollah — a mission which Lebanese diplomats here stress is far from accomplished.

The US media as well as the country's two political parties have granted Israel firm backing, though a handful of voices, including some Jewish-American journalists, have questioned Washington's handling of the conflict since Qana.

"The Americans and Israelis have played it wrong this time," said a senior Arab envoy. "The Americans started by blaming Hezbollah for the fighting and stressing Israel's right to defend itself, but after the Qana disaster they have to work swiftly to save Israel as both countries are now on the losing side."

The State Department spokesman, bombarded by repeated questions from Arab as well as US reporters, had a rough time trying to explain why Washington failed to condemn the Qana massacre at a time when it was quick to condemn an IRA bombing in London, and an attack against tourists in Egypt.

"So the objective now is not to inflame the situation further by condemning Israel or engaging in that sort of rhetoric at all," the spokesman said. "And it serves no purpose for any government spokesman or government official to get into any kind of a round of condemning Israel at this stage."

Lebanese officials, appearing regularly on American television, stress that Hezbollah attacks would end if Israel withdrew from the self-proclaimed security zone in southern Lebanon, in line with United Nations Resolution 425.

But Christopher even defended Israel's occupation of Lebanon although he said Israel "does not have any territorial aims with respect to Lebanon." He said on ABC's *This Week* with David Brinkley news programme that "for the moment, being in that security zone is necessary to protect northern Israel."

The aim of the latest US effort is not to bring about an end to the Israel-Lebanon conflict by forging an accord for Israel's eventual pull-out from areas it has been holding since 1978, but a deal which would grant Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres a much needed boost in the May elections as a tough leader who is as uncompromising on security as his Likud opponents, diplomats said.

On Monday this week, between 12 noon and 1pm, church bells and calls from mosques were echoing everywhere. A general strike had been declared and a great number of cars in the streets of Beirut had black ribbons attached to their antennas. It was remembrance day commemorating the 190 victims of the Israeli bombardment.

For the many organisations trying to help some 400,000 refugees, a great number of whom are housed in schools, it was yet another busy day. In a school in West Beirut housing 72 families, all in all 400 people, CARITAS Lebanon was distributing underwear and bras in small plastic bags when *Al-Ahram Weekly* arrived.

"We have been here for 11 days. We do not know if our house has been bombed. Everybody we know has fled," says Zahra Ibdah, from a village near Tyre, who together with her husband, daughter and granddaughter are sharing a classroom with two other families. Tables and chairs have been pushed aside, and a wire to hang the laundry has been tied from wall to wall. In the school yard, the youngsters are playing badminton.

"We support the resistance movement," says a peasant whose plot of land is located right in front of an Israeli checkpoint in South Lebanon. "Israel has occupied our land. We want it back. The day the Israelis are out, we will be against any attack on Israel."

We want to live in peace. This is our right," he added.

Mona Fawaz shares the same opinion. She is in charge of the press department of the 10-day-old National Movement for Lebanon's Survival (NMLS), an umbrella organisation joining 33 different NGOs (environmental groups, scouts, religious youth organisations, democratic movements). "The world must know that Israel is bombing civilians. They have only killed one Hezbollah fighter. The rest are civilians," said Fawaz.

Around her everything is beaming with activity. Scores of young people between the age of 18-25, wearing jeans and black boots are standing in a shop, which until Saturday was vacant, packing relief aid in big black plastic bags. The owner of the empty shop underneath the building housing the headquarters of the NMLS has offered it to the movement.

Piles of rice, sugar, soap, dispers, kitchenware, clothes and shoes were being put into sacks, while other young people were busy registering the names and checking the papers of refugees applying for aid. Other young people were arriving with small white boxes with Lebanese flags painted on them to deliver the money they have collected.

In the next shop, used as a press office, a number of activists were sitting in front of a computer sending information letters via the Internet, or faxing to NGOs in Europe, Canada

and the US. Everything seemed very efficient and well organised and all the young people were in fighting spirit.

"We have collected \$35,000 and distributed 3,770 relief packages to 20,000 people who are being housed privately with family or friends in Beirut, but who still need help," said Fawaz.

"This may not be much compared to what the government is doing. But the important thing is that we are working together in order to help. This is the first time since the civil war that we are working together without regard for religious affiliations. And we are very proud of this," says Fawaz who has black smudges under her eyes as a result of many sleepless nights.

The solidarity between Muslims and Christians protesting against the Israeli atrocities that have hit hardest at the predominantly Muslim areas of south Lebanon is something which many Lebanese, and not only Mona Fawaz are proud of. Earlier in the week, *L'Orient le Jour*, Lebanon's French language newspaper led with a banner announcing: "The Maronite bishops of Lebanon declare their solidarity with South Lebanon," a piece of news that an outsider may take for granted, but which is in fact news here.

"It is the first time ever that the Maronites are feeling solidarity with what is going on in West Beirut and South Lebanon, says the 45-year-old An-

nie Tohmé, an anthropologist teaching at the French University in Beirut, who also conducts research on coexistence between Christians and Muslims in some areas of the southern suburbs of Beirut.

"When Israel occupied South Lebanon in 1978, we were a small group of Christians who worked for the Red Cross, helping refugees who were staying in a stadium. This was viewed very critically by the Christians. 'What are you doing with them, the enemy', was their attitude. 'So at least it is something good that the Lebanese, now for the first time, see Lebanon as an integral unit, and that the Christians seriously care about what is going on in South Lebanon,' says Tohmé.

Only eight years ago, the Lebanese Christian militias were being trained in Israel. Today the Lebanese Forces are banned, their leader in jail, and could be soon facing a death penalty.

"In general, the Christians have now turned their back on Israel. Of course some Christians may still feel that Israel has something to offer them, but they are clearly a minority," Tohmé said.

"This feeling of national unity has begun to develop only recently. Time will show if it will last after this last threat is over. This war is a very serious threat to Lebanon. The socio-religious balance of the Lebanese society is still very precarious and can easily be

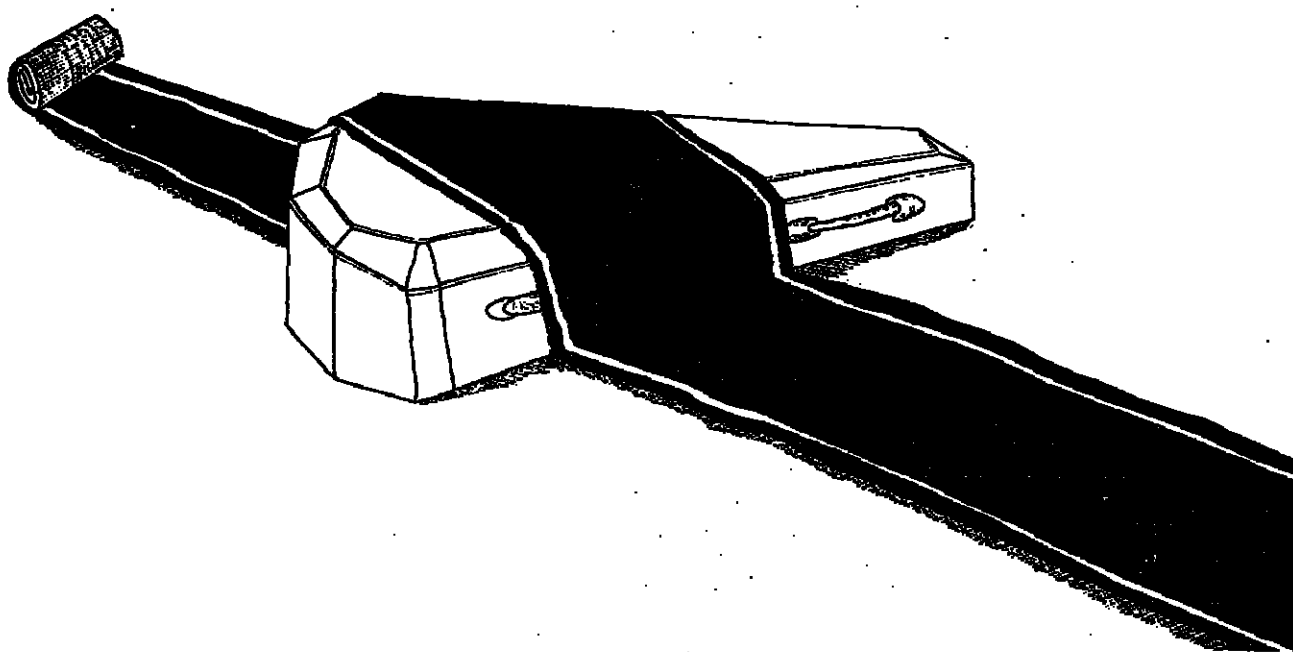
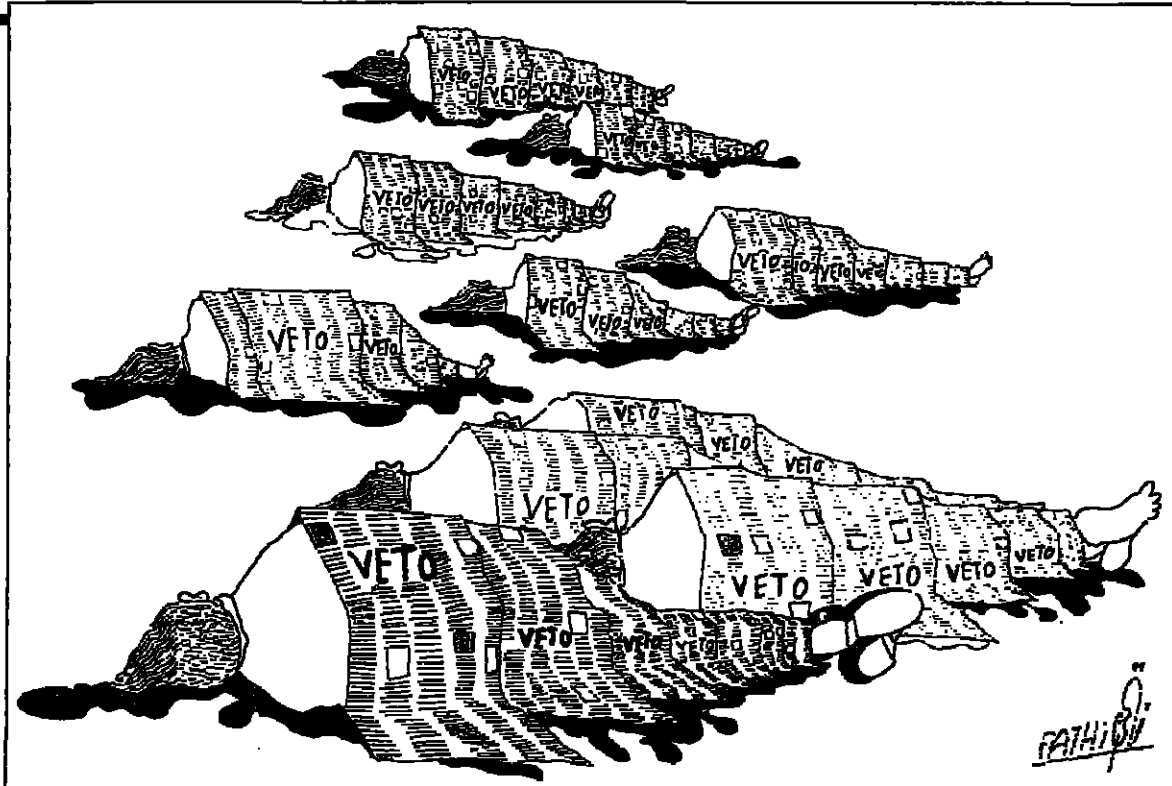
Amidst all the death and destruction the Lebanese stand as united as never before, writes Pernille Bramming from Beirut

tipped. Right now we do not know how many of the 400,000 refugees will have a place to return to in South Lebanon. And if they are to stay in Beirut, this could create a serious social problem, as it will disturb the political balance.

"You should not forget that it is not Hezbollah, but the economy and infrastructure of Lebanon that Israel is bombarding. Israel does not want Lebanon to be rebuilt. I do not want to appear arrogant, but honestly who is the competitor of the Jew in the Middle East? It is the Lebanese. The Lebanese has his international relations through the expatriates. He can easily communicate with the West, and can manage anywhere."

Tohmé scoffs at the suggestion that Hezbollah might have provoked Israeli wrath: "As a Red Cross veteran, I have stopped discussing who starts a war. Each side always blames the other. The fact is that Israel has occupied a part of Lebanon. If Israel withdraws, Hezbollah will no more have a raison d'être as a resistance movement," she said.

"The most outrageous thing is that the Israelis are as stupid politically as they are strong militarily," a political analyst said. "In 1984, Hezbollah was nothing, but because the Israelis continued the occupation of south Lebanon, Hezbollah acquired legitimacy, grew stronger and gained the sympathy of the Lebanese as a resistance movement."



Stories of solidarity

By Ghassan Al-Mikahhil

It is still too early to evaluate the overall results of the massive Israeli military operations which have been taking place in Lebanon for two weeks now. To what extent this operation will affect Lebanon, the region, and the peace process is yet to be fully understood. And although the tragic losses hitherto suffered by Lebanon have been the most terrible in years, it is perhaps a paradox that the Israeli aggression has had many positive effects on Lebanon, as a society and as a country, that may far outweigh the losses.

An early fruit of the aggression has been a sense of solidarity among Lebanon's various confessional groups, political and social forces, on a level unprecedented since the early seventies — that is, since the beginning of the civil war which lasted nearly two decades. There is also a sense that Lebanon has regained something of its previous status, within the Arab world and even internationally. Lebanon found a considerable space in discussions of the G7+1 summit in Moscow, according to French President Jacques Chirac. Similarly, there has been intensive action at the highest levels in both the Arab and international arenas, expressing solidarity with Lebanon, calling for an end to the aggression and demanding that reparations be paid.

Although the latest Arab League Council meeting on Lebanon fell short of the required Arab response, it nevertheless provided a valuable boost to the country's morale, especially when one takes into account that it is the first time since the Arab countries have united in many years. It is also significant in view of the strength of Arab condemnations of the aggression and expressions of solidarity with Lebanon. The Egyptian government's position in particular is remarkable, having been the most outspoken in criticising the US for its opposition to the Security Council resolution and the backing it gave the attacks.

The aggression has been devastating. Israel has unleashed its most deadly weaponry indiscriminately, forcing hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee, killing hundreds of others, mostly women and children, and wrecking havoc on the country's infrastructure at a time when Lebanon is trying to regain its economic vitality after years of civil war. Nevertheless, the faith of the Lebanese people in their country and their will to meet this new challenge remains very high, for many reasons.

Israel has failed to strike at all effectively at the resistance forces. Despite the massive military force aimed at them, the resistance fighters have been able to continue responding to the Israeli aggression by firing Katyusha rockets at northern Israel and conducting guerrilla operations against the occupation forces in South Lebanon.

The resistance fighters have also persevered in behaving ethically towards civilians on the front line. They have maintained their long-standing policy of avoiding military action in civilian areas, so as not to give Israel the slightest pretext to target these areas, and of providing many villages in the south with the means of day-to-day subsistence: food, medicine and education.

The conviction prevails among the Lebanese people that Israeli operations are aimed not only at Hezbollah of the resistance forces, but at the whole of the country. This feeling crystallised after Israel struck at the country's infrastructure and economic establishments in both Christian and Muslim areas, and after its massive attacks on civilians, particularly the Qana massacre. No one in Lebanon has any doubt that this horrifying slaughter was both deliberate and premeditated. People's personal experience has provided them with full knowledge of the accuracy of Israel's arsenal.

In targeting the positions of the Lebanese army from the first day of the aggression, Israel also convinced the Lebanese that its attacks are directed against the state of Lebanon itself. This knowledge has given a powerful impetus to feelings of national unity throughout the country.

The Lebanese government has steadfastly refused to give in to Israel and disarm Hezbollah, and has insisted on the right to resist occupation. Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri has been active regionally and internationally, embarking upon a tour which has included Syria, Egypt, France, Morocco and Saudi Arabia.

The Lebanese, despite their horror at the massacres and devastation committed by the Israeli forces, remain staunch in defending their right to continue resisting Israeli occupation forces in the south.

All of the above has created an astounding upsurge in popular unity, which has suffered from divisions and factionalism for many years. Beirut, which was the epitome of a city torn by confessional and political divisions, appears today as a single theatre of operations in support of the resistance and the people of the south, and is providing urgently needed assistance and services to the fleeing refugees.

The stories of solidarity are countless. A Christian woman donates the cost of fifteen Katyushas to Hezbollah. The main solidarity rally held in Beirut gathers at the Alexander Hotel in Christian East Beirut — the same hotel used as Israel's military headquarters during the Israeli invasion of 1982.

Furthermore, one may say confidently that this is the first time in Lebanon's modern history that the massive migration of refugees from a certain sect to areas inhabited by members of another sect does not cause political and demographic turmoil quite the opposite. For the first time since 1975, all the Lebanese perceive Israel as being the number one enemy.

David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, was convinced — as his memoirs and those of his successor, Moshe Sharett, make clear — that Israel must intervene in Lebanon to divide it and annex the south up to the Litani. Paradoxically, the latest events have revealed a totally different picture. Lebanon, long considered by the Israelis to be the Arabs' weakest link, has proved to be Israel's stumbling block.

In the 1982 invasion, Israel succeeded in striking hard and effectively at the unity of the Lebanese people. Operation Grapes of Wrath has had exactly the opposite result. In fact, it may be said that it has erased many of the traces and ills of the last invasion. The Lebanese are themselves surprised by the high morale evidenced by their compatriots, holding out in southern villages and cities, by the displaced, despite the harsh conditions under which they are surviving, by the determination of the resistance forces, the vitality of government action, the solidarity of the whole country, the sympathy shown by the Arabs and the whole world. All this has placed Israeli operations in a political and military quandary. More significantly, however, the latest Israeli invasion may have laid the real cornerstone for the reconstruction of Lebanon.

The writer is chief of the Arab and Foreign Desk at the Lebanese daily, *As-Safir*.

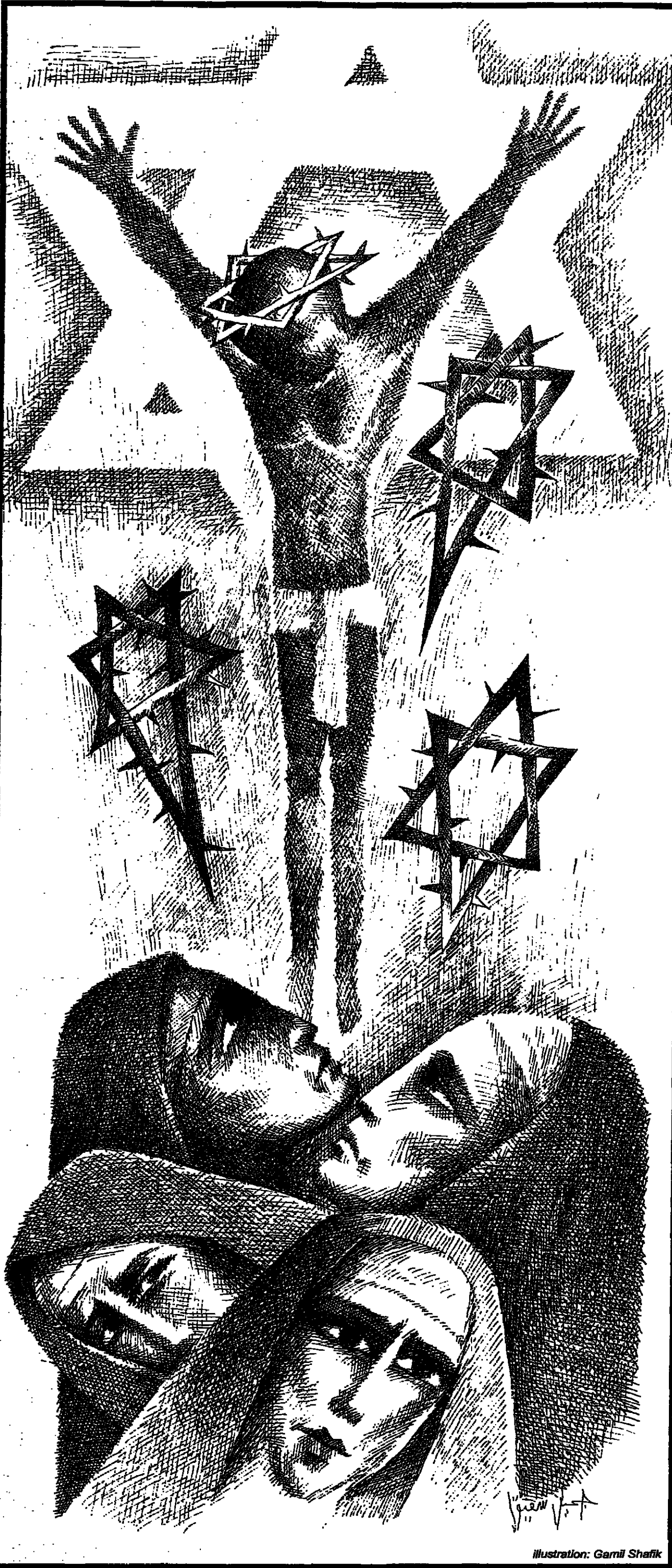


Illustration: Gamil Shafik

Israel's hidden agenda

By Nassif Hitti

It seems that the Israeli prime minister, Shimon Peres, has decided to conduct his election campaign in Lebanon. In the elimination of the "Katyusha Understanding", he has found a major vote-winner, one which could tip the balance in his favour.

Negotiated in July 1993, The Katyusha Understanding aimed at reducing and limiting military conflict between Israel and Hezbollah to a tolerable level, a level which would not have threatened the peace process at a critical stage in its development. Thus, the understanding reached by proxy between Israel and Hezbollah provided for restraining the latter from attacking the settlements in northern Israel in return for Israel's refraining from attacking the civilian population in Lebanon. In other words, the understanding aimed at localising the military conflict to a very great extent, confining it to the "security zone", the Lebanese occupied territories.

Both parties violated the understanding on numerous occasions, either to send particular "messages" across the borders or to test the will of the other. Yet both parties would immediately revert to compliance with the understanding, a *modus vivendi* produced by the very fragile and sensitive configuration of power in the region.

The understanding forced Israel to acknowledge Hezbollah as a political partner in the existing equation of power, even to accept its *de facto* right to conduct military operations against Israeli forces in southern Lebanon.

The understanding was supposed to manage the ongoing crisis situation on the Lebanon/Israeli borders and thus contain the threat that the situation could pose to the ever-stalled Lebanese/Israeli peace track. But Israel nevertheless made the decision to unilaterally drop it. Numerous factors lie behind this decision:

1 — The changing overall balance of power in the Arab-Israeli peace process, mainly as this relates to the implications for the Lebanese-Israeli track. The balance of power today, as compared to July 1993, has shifted strongly in favour of Israel. The fragile take-off period of the peace process is well behind us. Progress has been achieved on the bilateral tracks. Normalisation is proceeding, though slowly. Each Arab party is trying to consolidate what it has achieved and to shield its own track from any potential negative fallout from the other tracks.

Looking back at four-and-a-half years of Arab-Israeli negotiations, one cannot fail to witness the following emerging pattern: the more the peace process evolves despite setbacks, tensions, and stalling, the more the gap widens between different Arab policies, as inter-Arab coordination shrinks to become a part of history. It is these factors, "pluses" for Israel, which encouraged it to break its commitment.

2 — The political fever for combating terrorism, which reached its zenith at the Sharm El-Sheikh summit. Despite the summit's balanced final declaration, achieved thanks to efforts from Arab and European quarters, namely Egypt and France, Israel was able to use this anti-terrorism fever to legitimise a heavy-handed operation aimed at restructuring the security environment in southern Lebanon. This war was thus converted into a moral and pre-emptive mission against the forces of evil.

3 — Israel could exploit the generous understanding and great tolerance towards "candidate" Peres. Thus anything that helps him was equated with helping the peace process, even if such action violated international norms and rules, upset a much-needed status quo, or even violated the spirit and the logic of the peace process which it is supposed to serve.

4 — The absence of any credible Arab and international diplomatic deterrence encouraged the Labour government to renege on its foreign commitment to a *modus vivendi*.

It is an insult to one's intelligence to suggest that Israel's resort to an indiscriminate, disproportionate and excessive use of force is merely a reaction to Hezbollah's violation of the Katyusha Understanding, even if we assume that Hezbollah is solely responsible for the latest flare-up.

Such use of military force aims at creating an untenable situation for Lebanon and an embarrassing one for Syria in order to coerce both countries into a new agreement which would include stopping Hezbollah from conducting military activities in the Lebanese occupied territories. Thus Israel is trying to implement by force what it could not achieve by negotiation — having Lebanon, with Syrian guarantees, assume the role of policeman for its *de facto* "borders" within Lebanon. In other words, Lebanon is asked to legitimise Israel's security zone and then after a transitional period of "all quiet on the Eastern front", Israel can negotiate a peace treaty with Beirut on its own terms.

Such a demand has always been rejected by Lebanon on both moral and practical grounds, and there is no reason to believe that it would have voluntarily changed this policy. Since entering talks with Israel within the framework of Resolution 425, Lebanon has considered there to be two phases of negotiation, and that during the first phase both countries would develop mechanisms to implement the resolution through the establishment of a security structure which meets the security interests of the two nations in a balanced and reciprocal way.

Trying to circumvent Resolution 425 while seeking a written agreement outside its framework, which could amount to a semi-treaty between Israel and Lebanon, is an idea to which both Damascus and Beirut react with scepticism.

Despite its military preponderance, reinforced by the arrogance of power, Israel seems to have dragged itself once again into the Lebanese quagmire, unable to achieve its major goals and now facing increased pressure, provoked mainly by the carnage at Qana.

In the long term, the peace process will resume. However, great damage has been inflicted on prospects for the realisation of a societal peace. The atrocities committed in Lebanon, by the party which would like to go down in history as the architect of a new regional order, will reinforce the negative image in the Lebanese and Arab mind of the "other" and will definitely hinder and complicate the process of psychological normalisation.

At the current juncture, we are faced with two probabilities. Either a re-negotiated reaffirmation of the Katyusha Understanding, perhaps with some minor adjustments, negotiated in terms of firm commitments by the major power brokers, to serve as a transitional *modus vivendi* until better days arrive. Or the continuation of a protracted reduced level of aggression, of a nature that allows the mounting moral and political pressure on Israel to deflate, and finally run out of steam and die away with the Israeli elections.

In both instances, the only investment for the future of peace will be more injured memories.

The writer is professor of international relations and Middle East politics at AUC.

No longer to be ignored

By James Zogby

Seven thousand miles away from the shattered lives and rubble of Lebanon, the Arab American community nevertheless deeply feels the pain of the unfolding tragedy.

US press and television coverage have every day brought powerful images of death and destruction. The scenes all too vividly reminded us of past aggressions: 1993, 1982, 1979 and 1978, and back even further to the painful beginnings of our people's dispossession. It was as if Israel had pulled scabs off old wounds, creating pains as fresh as the first. The impact has been real, and may be immeasurable.

Struggling to make peace these past three years has not been easy. It has meant struggling to put aside past pain, forcing forgiveness. It was necessary but, at times, very difficult. There have been times in the past few days when it has seemed impossible.

Compounding our fury has been our frustration with official White House acquiescence to the Israeli assault and the silence of the American Jewish community.

For days, the State Department refused to criticise Israel's actions. As the massive bombardments continued, with Lebanon's civilian population and infrastructure the primary victims, the Arab American community became remarkably unified. Factions that had not agreed in two decades came together out of concern for Lebanon.

In all of this, the behaviour of many major American Jewish organisations has been inexcusable. Mimicking the arrogant falsification of the Israeli government, the organisations refused to bend,

even after the hideous massacre of Lebanese civilians in Qana.

When Israelis were victims of terror, Arab Americans responded with consolation and condemnation. Why, we asked, were American Jewish leaders now silent? But despite our shock, anger and feelings of betrayal, our community moved into action.

There have been demonstrations against the Israeli assault in major American cities. Congressmen have received numerous calls and visits from Arab Americans, and some have responded by issuing condemnations of the killing.

In an effort to press the administration, a summit of Arab American leaders gathered in Washington last week. We presented unified criticism of the Administration's silence at a White House meeting with the acting Secretary of State and leading White House officials.

Our call to the administration was direct: call for an end to the bombing, express condolence to the victims, and work toward an end of Israel's occupation of the south of Lebanon. Our message registered. Since the meeting, the White House has remained in constant contact with our community.

Next week Arab Americans will gather in a national demonstration in Washington. Senators, members of Congress and religious leaders will address the rally, and the Arab American leadership will meet again with White House officials.

Our effort at this point will be to press hard for a definitive US commitment to end the hostilities and the Israeli occupation, and to seek reparation for the damaged infrastructure of Lebanon.

In addition to our appeal to the administration, our summit also issued a firm challenge to the American Jewish community to speak out against Israeli atrocities in Lebanon and the collective punishment of the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza.

Our call, broadcast on television and appearing in major US newspapers, stressed that peace requires mutual respect and concern. It is unacceptable to Arab Americans that American Jewish leaders have not matched their stated commitment to peace with actions and words that bring us closer to that goal.

Even here, our challenge has brought some rays of light. Some American Jewish leaders have responded to our call and have joined us in writing a joint declaration calling for a "withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon," a US commitment to "strengthen Lebanon" and an administration commitment to ease the burden of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.

It has been a brutal and exhausting month. The emotional impact of what we have all experienced has been extreme. The challenges we have faced and the work we have been forced to do have been extraordinary.

But we have resolved not to surrender to the pain or the anger — that would accomplish nothing. We have also resolved to neither pity our weakness nor curse our fate. Even with our limited resources we have found the strength to respond and act effectively.

Tragedy has given us moral authority, and our resolve to act has given us the ability to reach out to allies and people of conscience both inside and outside of government.

As I sit here in Washington writing these words I see the face of that Lebanese father carrying his dead baby, the mutilated bodies in Qana, the fear on the faces of Lebanese citizens becoming refugees for the fifth and sixth time in their short lives, the pain of jobless Palestinians in Gaza unable to feed their families, and the humiliation and indignity suffered by millions living under yet a new form of Israeli occupation in the West Bank and Gaza.

All these events remind us that Israel and its supporters have not yet chosen peace.

But they also make it clear that we cannot afford the luxury of more anger or frustration. They require, not putting aside pain, but working to alleviate it, ever mindful of its persistent presence.

At our White House demonstration we will carry signs. Some will condemn the bombing and killing, and some will call for reparations to Lebanon. Some signs will bear the simple slogan "We vote, too" — a challenge and reminder to elected officials, and to ourselves, that we will not longer accept being ignored. They are also a reminder that we will only remain ignored and weak if we do not meet the challenge to strengthen ourselves and demand our rights, and defend the rights of our people.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

In a week when more than a hundred innocent civilians taking sanctuary in a UN base in the South of Lebanon were massacred, Roger Monroe talks to Dr Lillemor Eriksson, a former senior UNRWA doctor who for 30 years witnessed atrocities committed by Israel against the Palestinian and Lebanese peoples

Lest we forget

It was a breezy morning in late March when we met Dr Lillemor Eriksson, who had just returned from Gaza. She seemed to bring with her, somehow, an extra freshness, as though from the northern forests of her native Sweden. Her conversation, in a gentle Swedish lilt, communicates a warm cheerfulness and refreshing simplicity that is quite disarming.

She is delighted to be back in Egypt and appears quite at home strolling around the souqs and curiosity shops of Cairo. She has, in fact, a long acquaintance with Egypt. As a medical doctor and public health officer under WHO and UNRWA, Dr Eriksson has served for nearly 30 years in Africa, in Gaza, among the Palestinians in the camps of Lebanon, in Syria, in Jordan, in Afghanistan and in the Sudan. Her visits to Egypt have, therefore, been frequent.

How did she get into the "sealed off" newly independent Palestinian enclave? What was she doing in Gaza? What is life actually like there now? Starting with questions such as these, we had originally planned for an interview of an hour or so - maybe two? As it turned out, once Dr Eriksson had begun recounting the progress of her career in healing and warding off illness, we were launched out onto a saga which carried away both teller and audience, as if by the momentum of its own current, through a long afternoon and evening. She declined, even to pause for supper, only accepting a quick snack with tea in the kitchen - standing!

Of her recent visit in the sealed off Strip, Dr Eriksson said that she entered via Rafah, the one door still slightly ajar. She had secured a permit with the help of friends in the Cairo UNRWA office and was met by Palestinian friends on the other side of the fences. "Of course," she remarked, "Gaza is completely at the mercy of Israel. The economic situation is desperate with a large part of the work force deprived since February of their jobs in Israel. Complete closure of the borders means nothing imported, no rice, no wheat, no feed, no medicines. There is no bread in the market. Nor are they allowed to export their vegetables and fruits, normally a large source of income. Now farmers sit by the roadside selling crates of oranges and tomatoes for only a few shekels while fruit still hangs in the trees or rots on the ground, as vegetables spoil in the fields, with no chance of marketing. Fishermen are forbidden to leave the shore, so no fresh fish."

She speaks of mounting tension and frustration, as so many of the normal bread-winners bide their time in idleness. Bus loads of people, especially young people, come to Gaza City to stage large demonstrations protesting the closure.

"Gaza is full of contrasts today," Dr Lillemor continues. "New ten-storey buildings stand empty, built in the hope of providing housing for Palestinians returning from the Diaspora. The Gaza skyline has changed dramatically with high-rise apartment blocks. There is even a Marriott Hotel on the beach waiting to fling open its doors to five star tourists. But the camps are still there, although some previously muddy streets are being paved over with outside capital. Yet as any fool could understand, there is an obvious feeling of exasperation focused on the continuing collective punishment. The vast majority of people simply want to get on with their lives. There is the feeling that things cannot go on like this much longer."

Casting a bright ray onto a somber landscape, Dr Lillemor passes on the news that some quantities of flour were allowed to enter "the Strip" through Rafah as a humanitarian gesture on the day of the Sharm El-Sheikh conference.

Of her family and education, Lillemor Eriksson tells about her girlhood, growing up in beautiful, historic Goteborg, Sweden. Her father was an engineer and her mother a school teacher whose favourite subject was botany. The house was full of books and parents and family friends were full of interesting ideas. Young Lillemor thus instinctively took to books and inherited her mother's love of natural sciences. In her free time, she always loved and still loves rambling in the country, skiing in winter and swimming in summer. She frequently spends time off at the old family summer house on a small island near Goteborg.

Lillemor studied for her classical baccalaureate in her home city and entered medical college also in Goteborg. Her medical degree took some seven years to complete including internship. Upon graduation she first practiced her healing arts for a year in Stockholm. As she had always wanted "to get out into the world", she accepted a WHO fellowship at London University to study tropical medicine for the year 1960-1961. Where now to practice her speciality? Her mentor, Professor Macdonald at London University assisted her in finding an appointment in Uganda. She relates with amusement how she arrived to fill in her formal job application at the bureau concerned, only to find that they had just changed their name from "The Foreign and Colonial Office" to "The Office of Overseas Development."

Her first journey to Africa brought her to Entebbe, only a week before Ugandan independence amid great popular rejoicing. Dr Eriksson immediately set to work in gynecology and paediatrics in 1962.

Revisiting Sweden in 1965 and between jobs, Dr Eriksson met a Swedish doctor who was setting up a gynecology section and paediatric service at the Swedish hospital in Gaza City in the Rimal Quarter. Recognising her ample experience in these branches, he persuaded her to accept a post in this new department in Gaza. "This is how I became a

Middle Easterner," Dr Lillemor observes.

Gaza in 1965 under Egyptian administration was quite relaxed. It had a duty free port. Merchants did a thriving business, drawing many shoppers from Egypt. Dr Eriksson began her work by initiating a home economics course, a family planning programme, and basic sex education.

"Although living conditions in the camps were cramped and miserable, the population was healthy," Dr Eriksson recalls. "Refugees received rations, although the camps survived primarily on remittances sent by relatives working outside Palestine. All pregnant women and young children went to clinics. Infant mortality was declining. Family planning advanced, as many mothers first of all wanted an interval between children. More girls than ever were attending secondary school and finishing."

When Israeli forces were massing along the borders, in June 1967, Dr Lillemor was evacuated along with the UN forces and other UNRWA personnel to Beirut. A regular UN aeroplane service connected Gaza with Beirut. The following month, as she was among foreign personnel considered "essential" to the community, Dr Eriksson came back with other medical staff to Gaza. Their homes, they found, had been looted by Israeli soldiers. "My losses were trifling," she declared, "compared to what a million and a half Palestinians lost. They fled from the Israeli troops across the Allenby Bridge and were denied the Right of Return that September. The looters actually had stolen only my TV, car and refrigerator. But I was fortunate. Friends reported that my car had been sighted abandoned by the roadside in the north of the Gaza Strip. What luck! It had simply run out of gas just before the Israeli line. So all I had to do was go up and fetch it, where it stood, dusty but undented."

"That autumn, the tough Israeli invasion troops

was allowed to go to my clinic at the Swedish health centre. I invited the two British journalists to come along with me and perhaps bear some of what was going on. There they learned that the Jabaliya Camp had been completely sealed off. One of the ambulance drivers, from Jabaliya Camp, managed to get through and get back. He told how all men aged 18 years and over were forced to stand for 48 hours in a great pit, without food or water or toilets. When some of the old men fainted and collapsed, the Israeli guards fired warning shots into the air.

"So the resistance began and the vicious cycle: acts of resistance provoking community punishments, provoking guerrilla attacks, provoking camp and village bombings, provoking other resistance strikes, provoking further collective punishments - till when? Houses of suspects were routinely blown up. More houses were blown up to straighten and widen roads so as to facilitate lightning raids, searches, and arrests."

Most of the Egyptian doctors and nurses (except for some nurses married to Palestinians) who had served over the months and years in Gaza, were repatriated to Egypt.

"When the first Palestinian medical graduates returned from abroad to replace the Egyptian physicians," Dr Eriksson continues, "they had had to run the usual Israeli gauntlet of jail under preventive detention and required signing of documents swearing under oath never to engage in political activities. Many students, coming home for summer holidays from Eastern Europe, were also confined in preventive detention. Some spent their entire vacations behind bars. All Palestinians, students and emigrants were obliged to come back to their home areas under occupation to get ID cards periodically, or else lose their right to revisit their homes and families in the Occupied Territories."

In 1970, Dr Eriksson left UNRWA, first to study

"Our department of public health had to work full tilt of course during the Israeli invasion (more punishment) of 1978 which halted at the Litani River. Several hundred thousand panic-stricken Lebanese and Palestinian civilian refugees came swarming northwards before the intruders. Our UNRWA relief teams fanned out to bring relief to these anxious multitudes in distress."

At this time, when West Beirut security had broken down, Dr Eriksson and two British journalists endured a harrowing kidnapping. They were robbed and severely brutalised. The kidnappers were, Dr Eriksson is convinced, low criminals and not politically directed.

During the next two years, until 1980, Dr Lillemor worked in and out of Amman. She regularly visited the Palestinian camps in Jordan, Syria, Gaza, and conditions permitting, Lebanon, conducting public health seminars. "Health conditions improved tremendously in these years particularly in Jordan and Syria," Dr Eriksson recorded. "There was a dramatic decline in infant mortality. In the West Bank and Gaza, the health situation was much more complicated. The refugee camps were more crowded than ever, but the standard of living was definitely improving. A lot of men were working in Israel, which needed cheap labour. Many more Palestinians abroad sent home remittances. Growing numbers of young people were finishing secondary school. But on the grim side, most of the male population had by this time been rounded up and been through preventive detention. Secondary graduates were imprisoned. The psychological and physical effects of this sort of treatment were often devastating."

Dr Eriksson was called back to Beirut when in 1982 the Israeli "Defence Force" again invaded Lebanon in what they called their "Peace in Galilee" offensive. Her task was to oversee the UNRWA programme of preventive medicine among the

Eriksson recalls. "One day Israeli planes began breaking the sound barrier over Beirut, an attention getting technique. Then they rained down thousands of pamphlets telling the Lebanese to get out of West Beirut because they, the Israelis, were going to take it. Over the next few days a mass exodus of Lebanese began fleeing out of West Beirut, jamming all the roads with cars, trucks, taxis, and buses piled high, all heading for mountain areas. At the same time, great masses of civilians from Tyre, Sidon, and the refugee camps came tolling northwards, sometimes getting mixed in with Israeli tanks. These thronging tens of thousands were pushing into West Beirut in search of refuge. They camped in cinemas, schools, make-shift lean-tos, and bombed out buildings. Some camped in the streets."

The Palestinians were fairly well organised in looking after their people. They were after all a kind of state within a state and were used to being ready to move. The southern Lebanese, on the other hand, had practically no one, either chosen or appointed, to organise their welfare. Some students, mainly Shiites, came from door to door, asking for the most elementary support and supplies, so desperate they were."

Through this tangled criss-crossing of anxious populations fleeing into and out of Beirut, getting mixed up with the invading Israeli columns, Dr Eriksson and her teams still kept on setting out every morning, bringing medical supplies to Palestinian civilians, trying to chart their changing locations, recording what illnesses were striking, how many had died and how many were born.

"During the siege of West Beirut, the population had to endure long hours of shelling from the sea and mountains, as well as bombings from aeroplanes dropping the ghastliest and most sophisticated American made bombs." Dr Eriksson commented that she "was always much too busy to think of the worst dangers. The Israelis also generally did precision bombing, targeting the Palestinian camps and assumed Palestinian buildings. Certain known places one tried to avoid once the shelling and bombing started."

As the siege of Beirut was tightening, Dr Lillemor spent long days trying to collect and organise available medical supplies, and was greatly helped by a Lebanese pharmacist still opening to the public. "Widows of fighters helped by running deliveries of salt solutions to the many diarrhoea patients," Dr Eriksson remembers. "We carried out a mass immunisation against polio. We spent a couple of days working to get emergency supplies of anti-typhoid vaccine. Their urgent appeal was even on the BBC. Then someone realised there was no danger of typhoid because there was no water. The Israelis had cut off the water supply and typhoid is a water borne disease!"

"Water became an overriding obsession," Dr Eriksson goes on. "Palestinian fighters dug wells. Water distribution was one of my big projects. We discovered there was a large supply of water under a fire station. Our team organised the building of many metal tanks which were strategically placed in neighbourhoods and near large buildings. Then tanker trucks distributed the water around the city." Dr Lillemor organised UNRWA staff to prepare a chlorine solution. But how to distribute it? Easy? They emptied the vast numbers of small bottles of medicines which had gone bad from lack of refrigeration which was not functioning as the Israelis had cut off the electricity to all of West Beirut.

"Palestinian morale remained high all during the siege of West Beirut while the fighters were with their families," Dr Eriksson recalls. "Morale sank to depths of despair after the negotiated departure from Beirut of some 7,000 Palestinian fighters when the frightful massacres of civilians in the camps at Sabra and Shetila took place. These atrocities could hardly have occurred had the fighters been present."

Dr Eriksson remained in Amman till 1985 continuing her work among the Palestinian refugees in mother and child health, immunisation programmes and preventive medicine. "Among the most rewarding experiences," Dr Eriksson remarks, "was working with the teachers in the camps in school health programmes."

In 1985, back in Alexandria, Dr Eriksson took on an assignment in public health among the displaced people in Sudan. Retiring in 1989, Dr Eriksson stayed on in Cairo.

Why in Cairo? "A senior citizen here in Egypt receives the best treatment on all sides," she answered right away. Dr Eriksson enrolled at the American University in Cairo, taking special reading courses in Modern Egyptian and Palestinian Literature. "I even wrote a whole research paper in Arabic," Dr Eriksson chuckles with obvious pride of achievement, comparing Palestinian literature in the occupied land and Palestinian literature written in exile.

Her last remark before our farewells: "I intend to continue reading and studying Arabic as long as I live."



The Qana massacre in South Lebanon (photos: AFP)



'Palestinian morale remained high all during the siege of West Beirut while the fighters were with their families. Morale sank to depths of despair after the negotiated departure from Beirut of some 7,000 Palestinian fighters when the frightful massacres of civilians in the camps at Sabra and Shetila took place. These atrocities could hardly have occurred had the fighters been present.'

were replaced by Arabic speaking Israeli soldiers originally from Morocco and other Middle Eastern countries. With these troops, the Gazans had a common language and felt a degree of understanding. The Gaza citizens were also very happy to make contact with relatives and friends inside Israel. The overall atmosphere seemed fairly calm.

"Then in January 1968 occurred the first resistance action, followed by the first collective punishment in Gaza. The Israelis used (as they are still using these days) the old British mandatory laws, according to which, as punishment for resistance to occupation whole areas are sealed off, curfews imposed, houses of resistance suspects blown up, and suspects jailed for up to 90 days without formal charges and without access to lawyers."

"At this time arrived the first two outside journalists, Michael Adams and Irene Beeson. Under the day-and-night curfew no one was allowed to go out of their homes in the entire Gaza Strip. Reporting was, therefore, virtually impossible. However, I

in London, then for a post with the Ministry of Public Health in Afghanistan, where she served till 1976. Joining UNRWA once again in 1976, Dr Eriksson came out to Beirut where she assumed the position of director of the UNRWA Department of Preventive Medicine in charge of over 100 health centres in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza.

Her arrival in Beirut "was dramatic", as warring factions and militias were controlling the various regions of Lebanon and the neighbourhoods of Beirut. She entered Lebanon via Homs and Hama and came through the mountains. Although her posting was nominally in Beirut, her department headquarters were evacuated to Amman where she spent a lot of time from 1976 to 1980. "It was difficult administratively," Dr Eriksson recalls. "Communications were irregular and travel often very dangerous. Once again I set up housekeeping in Beirut at Ain Al-Mreissa in 1977, just down the hill from the American University in Beirut.

hundreds of thousands of civilian Palestinians and Lebanese once again fleeing northwards. Every day Dr Lillemor and her teams drove south bringing medicines to scattered and exhausted bands of humanity. Another essential routine was first to locate the again uprooted Palestinians on the move and then to determine and meet their most urgent health needs. She arrived in heavily bombed Tyre and Sidon the day after Israeli troops had over-run the Palestinian camps at Rashidiya and Bouj Al-Shamali nearby. To reach the southern areas, they had to wind over many different tortuous routes, by all sorts of mountain back roads and dirt tracks. All the way, they kept meeting long columns of Israeli tanks and armoured vehicles. She remarked that late in the day the Israeli soldiers looked curiously incongruous in their model camps, with showers, neat tents, and the latest American-style army comforts.

"There was no effective Lebanese government in control anywhere from West Beirut south," Dr

Remember Sabra and Shetila

Arafat's dilemma

The consensus seems to be that the Palestinian Covenant should be abolished only in return for Palestine's right to statehood, writes **Graham Usher** from Gaza as the PNC gathers on Palestinian soil for the first time in 30 years



Arafat raises his hand to cast his vote during a session in the PNC's first meeting held in Gaza in 30 years (photo: AP)

The assembling of 336 Palestinian delegates — including over 100 who have returned from the diaspora — for the 21st Palestinian National Council (PNC) meeting held in Gaza on 22 April has aroused decidedly mixed feelings among Palestinians — feelings of loss, hope and poignancy. If, for some delegates, there was a sense of pride in attending a PNC meeting on Palestinian soil for the first time in 30 years, for others the dominant scene was one of enormous frustration, fuelled by the morbid state of the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and, above all, by Israel's massacre of 104 Lebanese civilians in South Lebanon the previous week.

Whatever the emotions, the political imperative behind this PNC meeting was spelled out by its leader, Yasser Arafat, in his opening speech to the session. "I am calling on the PNC to amend the Palestinian National Covenant," he said. "We must do so to consolidate our negotiating position with Israel, which is using the question of the covenant to suspend the peace process."

This is a nice way of putting Arafat's dilemma. But the reality is that the present PNC meeting is occurring under duress because the Israeli government demands it. Israel had allowed the PNC to convene in the self-rule areas, said Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres earlier this month, "to amend those articles of the Palestinian Covenant that call for Israel's destruction". But it is as yet unclear when, how and if the PNC will do this.

Arafat committed the PNC to changing these articles in the 1993 Oslo Accords and again in the Oslo II Agreement signed in Washington last September, "within two months of the inauguration of the Palestinian Council [PC]". The PC, which is

the legislative arm of the Palestinian National Authority, met in Gaza on 7 March. And Peres — rocked by suicide attacks in Israel, the war in Lebanon and with elections on the horizon — is now calling in the chips.

Will the PNC oblige? According to the PNC's president, Salim Zaatout, the first three days of the sessions in Gaza were devoted to "procedural matters", such as establishing a new PNC membership and electing the PLO's Executive Committee. This means the debate on the covenant will not occur until the end of this week and possibly later. It is also not clear how the covenant will be changed.

Until recently, Arafat argued that the covenant's offensive articles could be rescinded by the PNC, "making official" those adopted policies that have long made the original covenant obsolete. The articles could be replaced by the PNC's 1988 decision to recognise Israel in exchange for a Palestinian state in the Occupied Territories and the PNC's 1991 sanctioning of UN resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis of any Palestinian-Israeli peace process. But re-

cent weeks have seen the PLO leader move away from this approach.

On 21 April, Zaatout said the PLO's legal committee would present several "draft" covenants for the PNC to discuss. But a preview of one of these drafts shows the PLO retreating not only from the maximalist positions outlined in the original covenant — where "Palestine" is identified with the "boundaries it had during the British mandate" — but also from the 1988 and 1991 decisions. One version anticipates the future borders of a Palestinian state, not in terms of Israel's withdrawal to the 1967 armistice line, but loosely in terms of those borders "agreed on" between Israel and the PLO "during the final-status negotiations".

This may be in line with the Oslo Accords, but it is dangerously vague, especially given Israel's insistence that it would not agree to any final settlement that meant a return to its 1967 "borders". And Arafat is too smart a politician to submit to the PNC a new covenant that does not command majority support. PNC sources suggest rather a compromise where Arafat calls for a covenant "based on" the PNC's 1988

Declaration of Independence with a clause annulling all previous PNC positions, including the old covenant. This would satisfy Arafat's commitments to Israel while reaffirming the Palestinian post-1988 national aims of statehood, self-determination and return in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Yet even this may find difficulty getting the necessary two-thirds majority from the PNC. Over 40 PNC members belonging to the PLO's Popular Front faction have said they will boycott any sessions aimed at annulling the old covenant. But many other independent members have expressed the view that the covenant should only be abrogated in return for Israel's explicit recognition of Palestine's right to statehood. "I am for amending the covenant," says former PLO spokeswoman and PNC member Hanan Ashrawi, "but only when the conditions that gave rise to the covenant are removed. As long as Israel refuses Palestinians national rights or even the minimal parity of recognising our right to self-determination, why should we grant Israel absoluteion."

Khomeini's looming spectre

CONTRARY to earlier expectations, the Islamic hardliners swept to victory in the second round of parliamentary elections in Iran this week. Final results showed that they had won a total of 146 seats in the 270-seat parliament. They campaigned on a platform defending the principles of the 1979 Islamic Revolution and rejecting Western values. The hardliners are staunch critics of President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's plans to liberalise the economy and lift subsidies on food and fuel.

The outcome of the elections is a triumph for Ayatollah Khomeini, the spiritual leader of the Association of Militant Clergy (AMC), the main rival to Rafsanjani. Khomeini's close ally Ali Akbar Nategh-Nuri, official leader of the AMC, is set to be re-elected as parliamentary speaker at the inaugural session on 29 May. He is also expected to contest the presidency in next year's presidential elections.

The results dealt a blow to Rafsanjani, who is constitutionally barred from standing for re-election having already served two consecutive four-year terms. Had the more moderate block, the pro-Rafsanjani Servants of Iran's Construction group, won a majority, they would have authorised a bill amending the constitution, allowing Rafsanjani to stand as a presidential candidate for a third time.

Nevertheless, the number of clerigymen in parliament seems to be diminishing. They occupy 50 seats in the incoming parliament, compared to 65 in the last one and 125 in the parliament formed immediately after the 1979 revolution.

New cabinet in Khartoum

SUDANESE President Lieutenant General Omar Al-Bashir has announced his first cabinet reshuffle after the March parliamentary and presidential elections. It comes at a time when UN sanctions against Sudan are looming on the horizon for the regime's failure to hand over three suspects in the assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa last June.

However, the reshuffle appears to be a cosmetic procedure as Bashir left the major portfolios of interior, defence and foreign affairs in the same hands.

The only major portfolio to change was finance, which went to Abdel-Wahed Osman, a bank chairman. The move signals the government's attempt to tackle Sudan's faltering economy, which is struggling with rising inflation, a depreciating pound and foreign debt valued at a staggering \$16 billion.

In a new development, the main suspect in the Mubarak assassination attempt, Mustafa Hamza, told the London-based Arabic daily *Al-Hayat* that he had been living in Afghanistan for the past eight months — a remark which appears intended to cast doubt on assertions that Sudan has been harbouring the suspects.

Meanwhile, the Sudanese Alliance Forces, one of the four military factions grouped under the opposition umbrella movement, the National Democratic Alliance, killed 15 government soldiers in a strike this week near the northeastern town of Kassala.

The attack, just a few miles from the border with Eritrea in eastern Sudan, follows the capture by the Southern People's Liberation Army last month of two garrison towns further south on the border with Ethiopia.

Turkey's regional ambitions

Turkey's ambitious military strategy is a means of acquiring a hegemonic status in the region, writes **Galal Nassar**



Turkey's Western inclinations are hardly a recent phenomenon. While the Western-Asian secular state is seeking to be admitted to the EU, Turkish-American ties have remained strong since the 1950s when Turkey joined NATO. In recent times, Turkey was seen to be edging closer to Israel.

The country's military accord with Israel, signed last February, allows Israeli aircraft to train in Turkish airspace and to use Turkish air bases. Defending the accord with Israel, Turkey's under-secretary of state for foreign affairs, Ouzur Oymen, said on a visit to Cairo this week, that the agreement with Israel allows for military training only and does not have any military offensive purposes.

Nevertheless, observers believe that the accord reflects Turkey's underlying aspiration to become the main regional power in the Middle East. Another suspected motive is to play a greater role in the region's security arrangements, at least from a Western standpoint.

Turkey's means of acquiring military superiority is to maintain a strong military arsenal backed by well-defined strategic goals. This new direction crystallised after the 1991 Gulf War and the subsequent political and strategic changes in the region. The same year witnessed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Having outlived its usefulness, Turkey strove to abandon its traditional role as NATO's front defence line against the Soviet giant.

Turkey is now steering away from its defence role toward a more aggressive posture. This altered strategy requires an instrument for implementation, and the answer lies in military superiority over its neighbours, aided by a burgeoning military industry. American military bases inside the country and membership in NATO.

At the same time, and in order to make full use of the economic and commercial opportunities as well as sources of energy and nuclear power, the Turkish leadership also turned to the predominantly Muslim Central Asian republics as well as the oil-rich Gulf states which offer markets for Turkey products. In these two

regions, Turkey is vying for influence with Iran and Pakistan.

Turkey's strategic position, overlooking the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, the Aegean and Marmara, connecting it to Asia and Europe through sea and ground links, provides the country with an advantage and serves its military ambitions. With a population of 60 million at present and a projected 69 million by the end of the century, Turkey can raise a strong army of more than one million men in an emergency.

More important, Turkey is a link between the Middle East and the West and what is in common with Israel is that both countries serve Western interests by posing as deterrents to anti-Western Middle Eastern regional powers. Turkey's powerful army has enabled it to represent Western military interests in the Middle East. Israel and Turkey are also the two most powerful regional countries, from a military viewpoint.

In Turkey, the army is considered the state's main pillar and it has always occupied a prominent position

in the political system. The army intervened in political life three times over the past 30 years through military coups in 1960, 1971 and 1980.

To build up its military capability and bolster its growing regional political role, Turkey has upgraded its armed forces and equipment through financial and technological assistance from NATO. Currently, the military balance of power between Turkey, Iraq and Syria indicates that the former is in the lead in terms of men and weapons.

Turkey boasts a 640,000-strong army, of which 90 per cent are conscripts and a 1.1 million in reserve. The country's impressive ground, naval and air forces are witness to the importance attached to its military might. Ground forces comprise 530,000 men, naval forces 55,000, while there are 64,000 air force personnel.

With the help of the US and Germany, Turkey is set to continue to expand its technologically advanced arsenal in line with its new aggressive posture. A \$4.5

billion allocation was put aside to manufacture 160 F-16 fighter planes. There are plans to equip the armed forces with new early warning and surveillance planes, warships and electronic radar systems. Turkey is also about to purchase 95 LLH-60 Black Hawk helicopters worth \$1.1 billion.

A significant development in Turkey's arsenal is a nuclear programme designed to turn Turkey into a nuclear power by the end of the next decade. Presently Turkey has a vast nuclear energy institute and it has just concluded a deal to purchase two nuclear reactors from Argentina. Two other reactors from Canada and Germany are in the pipeline. Even though it is said that the reactors are for energy-generating and peaceful purposes, they could be used to produce nuclear weapons. It has been reported that Uranium-235 is currently produced both legally and illegally. The Commonwealth of Independent States, particularly Tajikistan, supply Turkey with nuclear scientists. Short and long range ground-to-ground missiles and modern fighter planes, with the capacity to fire nuclear warheads, were recently acquired.

It is obvious that one of Turkey's motives for acquiring nuclear capability is to match Iran's potential nuclear power. It could also be a deterrent against any regional power that threatens Western and American interests.

In the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War, Turkey upgraded its space programme, particularly in scientific research, to release satellites. It established a space research agency with the help of scientists from Tajikistan. Turkey announced it intends to devote its space programme to produce a highly-technological satellite for communication purposes. At a later date, the facilities will be used for military purposes such as espionage. Israel is expected to cooperate with Turkey in this field.

Turkey's overall security perception in the region is based on the conviction that it is one of NATO's powers and, therefore, it is one of the key elements of international security in the Middle East.

Arab dissidents challenge Whitehall

Arab dissidents are confident that they will triumph over the tide to turn away asylum seekers, reports **Doaa El-Bey** from London

Britain's traditional standing as a refuge for Third World political dissidents seeking freedom of expression appears to be waning. Earlier this year, British Home Secretary Michael Howard announced that due to financial constraints, the number of asylum seekers would be restricted. Reportedly, the Home Office receives around 40,000 applications for asylum per year. Last year, less than 900 were admitted and now, the government says that it can no longer afford to support asylum seekers.

However, there are indications that finance is not the sole reason behind the decision. Political observers cite domestic considerations, relations with other countries and mounting international pressure as additional motivations. In recent years, Britain has come under increasing pressure to impose tougher asylum laws.

A number of Arab opposition figures affiliated to militant groups, some of whom escaping prison sentences in their countries of origin, were granted political asylum in Britain during the last decade. As a result, countries in the region objected that Britain was becoming a base for "terrorism", and a fertile ground for militant elements who mastermind attacks in their home countries and other neighbouring European countries from abroad.

Britain has allowed the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to publish weekly and monthly periodicals promoting their cause. These publications sometimes openly urge the use of violence. Rashed Al-Ghanouchi, leader of Al-Nahda, a Tunisian Islamic party, was granted political asylum in Britain three years ago.

France has been one of the loudest critics, demanding that Britain carefully consider applications for political asylum from North African dissidents, particularly from Algeria and Tunisia. France was the scene of a series of bombings late last year that were said to be committed by militants from Algeria who were granted asylum in Britain. This week a British court set a date for an extradition case against an Algerian wanted in connection with a wave of bombings in France last summer.

A strong Jewish lobby in Britain has also been demanding a curb on Palestinian and Lebanese charity groups operating in the UK.

The government bowed to pro-Israel pressure by putting the Palestinian Aid and Development Fund (Interpal) under the supervision of the Charities Committee responsible for organising the work of charities in Britain. Israel had accused Interpal of funding Islamic movements such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, which carried out suicide bombings in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ashkelon last February.

The attempt by the Home Office to expel the Saudi dissident Mohamed Al-Massari to the Caribbean island of Dominica because his presence in Britain threatened to damage British-Saudi trade relations was one of the government's latest attempts to clamp down on Arab dissidents. Recently, the British government backed-tracked on its decision after the Chief Immigration Appeals Ad-judicator overruled its decision.

Such incidents, coupled with the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill immediately before Easter, rang alarm bells. Although the said bill was meant to target the IRA, it also poses a threat to Arab opposition groups. The bill empowers police in Britain to search pedestrians, and unoccupied buildings and grants them the right to establish temporary security cordons and parking restrictions.

Nevertheless, Arab and Islamic groups are confident that as long as they abide by the law, nothing will happen to them. Essam Mustafa, vice-president of Interpal, said that as long as one respects British laws, no harm can be inflicted. "If a law is issued to prevent charity societies giving Palestinian children and needy people assistance, then it must be applied evenly. The authorities will also have to stop the Jewish institutions which send millions of pounds to Jewish settlers," he said.

Mustafa added that putting Interpal under the supervision of the Charities Committee did not affect the fund's activities; it only delayed assistance to Palestinians. This measure only proved that "we're in a world where the aggressor is made to be a victim and vice-versa," said Mustafa. Although he did not mention a particular Arab regime by name, Mustafa remarked that "our regimes

are determined to deprive us of the freedom we enjoy here".

Massoud Chagara, chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the self-declared Muslim Parliament of Great Britain, dismissed fears that Britain is losing its status as a refuge to Arab and Islamic dissidents. Chagara said that Muslim groups like the Muslim Parliament "should step in to help with supporting the asylum seekers".

In Chagara's opinion, the anti-terrorism bill that was introduced recently will have little effect on Arabs as it targets those involved in active violence. He pointed out that Massari was not deported, and similarly the Palestinian funds were not completely frozen as Israel wanted. "As for the Interpal business, the Muslim community unanimously condemned it," said Chagara.

Mustafa added that the former leader of the Muslim Parliament, the late Kalim Siddiqui, had sent a letter to British Prime Minister John Major expressing his deepest alarm at "the current hype in the media against Muslims in Britain" and condemned reports linking Muslim charities in Britain with recent events in Palestine.

Fouad Al-Kaabi, an Iranian researcher based in London, said that the recent government measures will not affect the freedom of expression or deprive any genuine asylum seekers from their right to take refuge in Britain. The Prevention of Terrorism Bill, according to him, will not affect the Arab or Iranian opposition groups that respect the laws of the country.

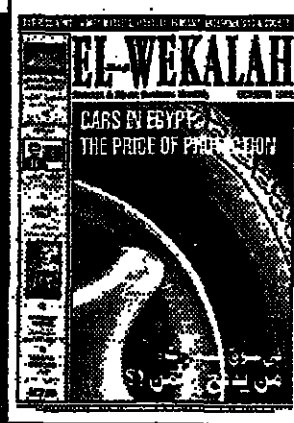
Al-Kaabi believes that the British government aims to limit illegitimate immigration and deter those who seek asylum for economic reasons under false pretences, such as claiming to be under threat in their home countries.

Al-Kaabi expressed his belief that Britain, like other Western European countries, will not give up its deeply-rooted principles of freedom of expression, but will find itself forced to reconsider its current liberal values. "It will do so in the hope that the extremist groups that do not believe in freedom or democracy will not use Britain as a base for fomenting violence and terrorism in the name of religion," he said.

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Clinton feted by Akihito

Clinton's visit to Japan last week strengthened the special relationship between America and Japan. **Mansour Abul-Azm** followed the presidential cortege in Tokyo

It is the custom among Japanese parliamentarians to close their eyes when listening to an important speech or lecture. That presumably helps them concentrate on the speaker's words and to reflect on the import of the words. Foreigners who do not understand the Japanese habit think that Japan's parliamentarians are sound asleep or bored. Nothing can be further from the truth.

United States President Bill Clinton was last week the second American president to speak to a full Upper and Lower House of the Japanese Diet, or parliament, since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1854.

On balance, the relationship between the US and Japan is an unequal one. And it is not the trade surpluses alone that are in the Japanese's favour. On the level of diplomatic relations also, Japan fares better than the US. For far more top-level Japanese officials visit America than American officials visit Japan. Only seven American presidents have visited Japan in the past 142 years, while every single Japanese prime minister has paid an official visit to America during his term in office.

What is even more surprising is that the very first visit to Japan by an American president took place only 22 years ago, when Gerald Ford made the trip in 1974. President Clinton took the opportunity while speaking to a packed Diet of confirming the strength of the relationship between the two countries. He emphasised the need to strengthen further already strong ties between Japan and America.

He stressed that their alliance must continue well into the 21st century, for the best interests of the two nations and for world peace and stability. Japan and the US are the two most important democracies in the world today and have the two most powerful economies.

President Clinton apologised for the kidnapping and rape of a Japanese girl by three American servicemen on the southern Japanese island of Okinawa, 1,600km south of Tokyo. About two-thirds of all American troops in Japan are stationed in Okinawa. Clinton also paid tribute to Ja-

pan's participation in peacekeeping activities around the world and to the financial support Japan gives to peacekeeping missions in countries as far afield as Cambodia and the Middle East. Clinton emphasised the importance of Japanese support for the Middle East peace process.

The American president reiterated his praise of Japan's foreign policy during a banquet given in his honour by Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko. The Japanese emperor, in turn, held the biggest-ever banquet in Japanese history for the visiting Bill Clinton, Hillary Clinton, the presidential entourage and American and Japanese dignitaries, who numbered around 156 and were lavishly entertained in the imperial palace.

Clinton and the emperor exchanged some words. Akihito said that he had never stopped and would never stop hoping that the Japanese and American peoples would continue striving to solve the problems that concerned them with a common goal: the realisation of world peace and prosperity. Clinton replied by stressing the importance of the American-Japanese alliance.

A poem by the famous eighth-century Japanese poetess Onono Komachi was then recited. Clinton toasted with his favourite drink, vodka, and listened to the strains of a saxophone playing *West Side Story*. Clinton is an accomplished tenor sax player. The traditional Japanese delicacy of raw fish — sushi — was then dished out.

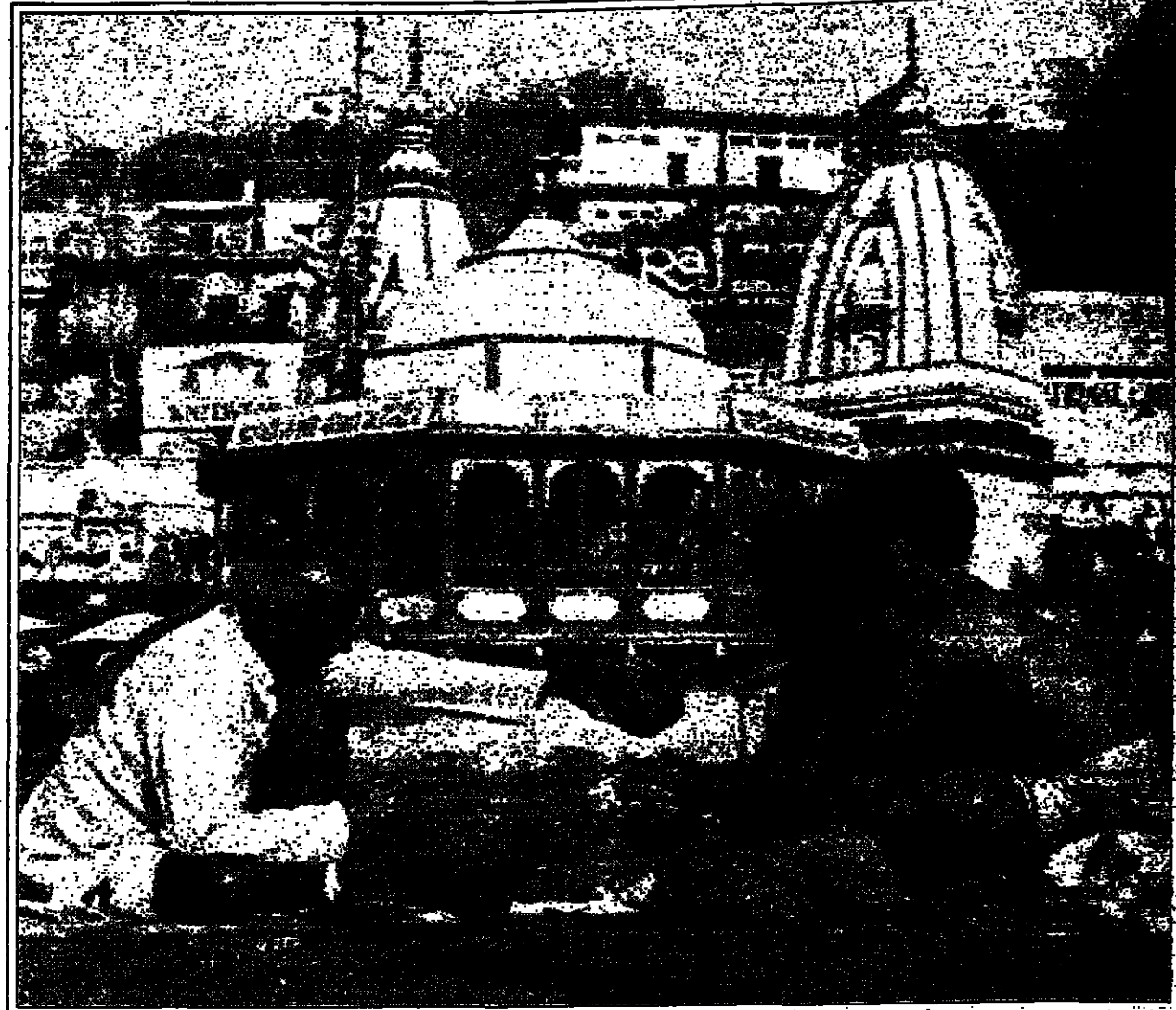
On a more sombre note, Clinton's three-day visit caused Japan to undertake the biggest security operation ever seen in the country. Twenty-two thousand of Japan's most-qualified policemen were deployed to search the places which lay on Clinton's itinerary, especially Tokyo's metro system which has recently been the scene of poisonous nerve gas attacks by the Aum Shinri Kyo religious sect. The group's leader, Shoko Asahara, 40, is currently facing prosecution. Reports have revealed that the sect was planning to assassinate the American president last November, the date for which his visit this month was originally scheduled.

Clinton's visit took him aboard the American aircraft carrier Independence, anchored in the waters of the Yokosuka naval base in Tokyo, in a strong show of support for the American military presence in Japan. He stressed that the American forces were a guarantor of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Clinton also visited the American Chrysler car showroom in the Japanese capital to show how much he approved of the presence of American goods in the Japanese market.

Hillary Clinton received a warm welcome from the Japanese people and especially from the fair sex. Japanese women appeared to be impressed by the strength of character, wit and independence of America's first lady. It was as if Mrs Clinton was the living proof of the success of American women.

The wife of American ambassador to Japan, Walter Mondale, hosted a luncheon to which Mrs Clinton and 13 prominent Japanese society ladies were invited. It was an opportune moment to compare and contrast the daily cares and aspirations of Japanese and American women both as workers and professionals in the job market, and as homemakers.

Mrs Clinton was briefed about the great strides that Japanese women have taken to break into the male-dominated Japanese business world. Economic and trade concerns were not left out of Clinton's discussions in Japan, but security and military matters were certainly at the top of his agenda. A spokesman for the Japanese Foreign Ministry explained that this was because of the progress that has been achieved in the field of commerce over the last three years.



TWO BROTHERS receive instruction from a Hindu Brahmin priest (left) for the salvation of their father's soul on the banks of the sacred Ganges River in the ancient city of Haridwar. Hindu devotees and foreign tourists flock to Haridwar for spiritual renewal. India's tourist industry received a severe blow last week when a bomb destroyed a hotel in the heart of the Indian capital New Delhi, writes Heba Samir.

Indian explosion

Separatist rebel groups claimed responsibility for the bomb blast that ripped apart the hotel on Sunday. The explosion killed 15, including nine foreign tourists, and injured 35. The joint claim by two small separatist groups from Kashmir and the neighbouring state of Punjab came in a written statement from Srinagar, the centre of a six-year war for Kashmir's independence from India.

The blast came a week before voting begins in India's general election, which rebel groups have vowed to disrupt. Bal-

loting will be held in Kashmir for the first time since the rebellion erupted there in 1989. More than 12,000 people have been killed in the uprising. The Jammu and Kashmir Islamic Har-

kat Ul-Ansar, one of the two groups claiming responsibility, said the bombing was carried out to avenge New Delhi's decision to hold elections in the troubled state. The group is based in Muzaffargarh in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

It was the fifth bombing in Delhi since last September. Muslim groups in Kashmir have called for a boycott of the elections and demanded a UN-supervised referendum on self-rule instead, threatening to sabotage the polls which India will conduct with military help.

Kashmiri Muslims are frequently blamed by police for explosions and are often arrested and charged after blasts. India has repeatedly accused Pakistan of arming and training Muslim separatists (photo: AFP).

Four-way fate foretold

The US and South Korea proposed peace talks, but China and Japan hold the trump card that could seal the two Koreas' fate, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

These are crucial days for the two Koreas. Last week, American President Bill Clinton and his South Korean counterpart, President Kim Young-Sam, proposed four-way peace talks between the United States, the two Koreas and China designed to usher in lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula. Only a fortnight ago, North Korean incursions into the demilitarised border zone and its accusations that Seoul was militarising the southern section of the zone resulted in an escalation of tensions in the region.

Raw Cold War quarrels linger on in northeast Asia. Ambassador Park Soo Gil, South Korea's permanent representative to the United Nations, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "the UN Security Council should take some action against North Korean provocation". He added that Pyongyang's "flagrant violations of the 1953 armistice agreement should not go unpunished". In Cairo, South Korea's newly appointed ambassador to Egypt, Yim Sung Joon, agreed. "Pyongyang makes it clear that it wants to communise and control the entire Korean Peninsula," he said.

That Clinton visited the South Korean capital Seoul and not the North Korean capital Pyongyang on his recent Asia tour was nothing worth noting. What was interesting, though, was that China, Pyongyang's erstwhile ally, announced a few days later that it was prepared to take part in the proposed four-way peace talks. China's Deputy Foreign Minister Li Zhao Fing, who was in Cairo recently to sign the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone, said that China believes "that there should be a long-term new peace mechanism to replace the current mechanism of the armistice". He emphasised, though, that until then China would like the 1953 armistice agreement to remain valid. "The [Korean] crisis should be resolved through consultations held between the directly interested parties," he added.

It looks like China holds most of the political cards — being ideologically close to North Korea and economically closer still to South Korea. To Japan fall the plum economic spoils of peace and with America rests the responsibility of securing the region, since it is the world's unchallenged military superpower. The tense stand-off between the two Koreas has not escalated because China and the US have kept Seoul and Pyongyang on a tight leash. But Seoul does not always toe the American line. Business is business with South Korea. It has massive investment projects in the Arab world — including states that are blacklisted by Washington. This week, South Korea's Dong-Ah Construction Industrial Corporation signed a \$10 billion deal with Libya to build the Great Man Made River project. North Korea, on the other hand, has come under intense diplomatic pressure from the US to stop supplying arms to Middle Eastern states.

Ambassador Yim, explained: "The four-way proposal is realistic. We want to involve both the Chi-

nese and Americans. North Korea insists on having peace talks with the US alone. We needed some kind of counter-proposal. There are two phases to the four-way proposal: the two Koreas start negotiations first and China and the US join later. The two Koreas are responsible for peace in the Korean Peninsula. The US and China [will assume a] supporting role and together we shall establish a permanent peace structure. We have received no response from North Korea yet."

Yim said, "Tensions between Seoul and Pyongyang were heightened last week because North Korea announced it would no longer recognise the 43-year-old armistice agreement." There was a time when the outcome of the 1950-53 Korean War was seen as one of the key events in the reconstruction of contemporary Asia. Today, the past is dismissed with some scepticism; all eyes are squarely fixed on the future. Deliberations over the future of Asia have been going on since the end of the Cold War. Compromise has become something of a dirty word to many participants in the deliberations — and no

more so than when the debate concerns the two Koreas.

To the West, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, better known as North Korea, represents economic disaster, political ineptitude and is militarily menacing. Ironically, though, South Korea is no West Germany. Nobody in Asia or in the West seriously believes that South Korea can, in the foreseeable future, absorb North Korea as easily as Bonn did East Berlin. True, the Republic of Korea, or South Korea, is a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and a prospective member of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). But its accession to the exclusive rich-nation OECD club was not unconditional. Unlike, say, former communist East European nations like the Czech Republic and Hungary, which were welcomed into the Western fold with open arms, South Korea had to prove that it was worthy of such an honour. There were last-minute hiccups over Seoul's human rights and labour relations records. Western governments did

not turn a blind eye to what they saw as South Korea's shortcomings.

The import of Western double standards is lost neither on other Asian nations nor on the Third World at large. South Korea is a widely acknowledged economic powerhouse. Nevertheless, the future of North Korea is immensely important; if Pyongyang falls, its demise might spell disaster for the remaining communist-ruled giants of East Asia — the People's Republic of China and Vietnam. On the other hand, Pyongyang's survival as a communist-ruled, one-party state will serve as a grim reminder to the Western world that an alternative to multi-party democracy is going to thrive well into the 21st century.

Pyongyang has in the past contended that Seoul cannot be part of a new peace agreement on the Korean Peninsula because it did not sign the 1953 armistice. Beijing, on the other hand, was like Pyongyang, a signatory to the armistice. Pyongyang's insistence that it conduct bilateral talks with Washington was rejected by Seoul, which insists that it be

party to any peace discussions. Pyongyang dismisses Seoul as a puppet of the US. "The Korean armistice agreement was signed by North Korea and the US. The South Korean puppet are not eligible to poke their nose into the issue," warned a strongly worded editorial in North Korea's ruling party organ *Koryong Sinmun*.

Achieving a permanent peace agreement in the Korean Peninsula is the stated aim of Washington, Seoul and Pyongyang. It is also a critical foreign policy objective of both China and Japan. Seoul seems fated to confront awkward questions about its relationship with Washington — and so does Japan. The international media focused their attention on the South Korean student demonstrations which took place during President Clinton's recent visit to the country. The students were protesting America's condoning of crackdowns on students and workers by the authoritarian military regime that carried out the Kwangju massacres of democracy activists in 1980. Similarly, the international networks provided extensive coverage of Japanese demonstrations against the US military presence in Japan.

South Korea is re-negotiating a 1966 agreement which gave US servicemen special legal privileges. Seoul wants greater jurisdiction over the 37,000 US troops stationed on its soil. Hostility towards the American army is increasing in both South Korea and Japan because of what is seen as the criminal and contemptuous conduct of some US servicemen.

Japan is by far the most generous host nation of the American military. Japan makes payments totalling \$6 billion to offset the cost of stationing the 47,000 American servicemen on its territory. Few observers of the Korean scene would pretend that Japanese money does not matter.

Last week, talks were held between North Korea and the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation (KEDO), a consortium of South Korea, Japanese and American companies and government representatives. A \$4.5 billion deal was signed between Pyongyang and KEDO last December. What has become apparent is that without Japanese technical expertise and financial backing, North Korea's rich resources will not be harnessed. American and South Korean help is also welcome, but the onus is on Japanese financial muscle.

Last week, South Korea requested the purchase of nearly \$200 billion of US military weapons including surface-to-surface missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, three destroyers and a number of submarines. The militarisation of South Korea has been a bone of contention between Washington and Pyongyang. The issue was raised during talks between Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Robert Einhorn and North Korean officials in the German capital Berlin this week. The US donated some \$2.2 million in direct cash aid to North Korea to alleviate food and medicine shortages. But it is doubtful if American aid is a sign of a substantial rapprochement with Pyongyang.

Extracts from the interview with South Korean Ambassador Yim Sung Joon

Can South Korea defend itself against the North Korean military threat without the help of American troops [on our territory] is important in terms of our joint military posture against any possible North Korean provocations. At the same time the presence of American troops is contributing to the stability of the whole [northeast Asian] region even after the end of the Cold War. In terms of South Korean defence capabilities, I can confidently say that we are capable of repelling and countering any North Korean provocations.

What are the reasons behind the current tensions? North Korea felt very insecure after the collapse of the former Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Pyongyang's recent provocations are a dramatic change of course. They want to escalate tensions [in order to] secure economic assistance from the US. Pyongyang's strategy is a wrong course of action. Pyongyang should have recourse to South Korea, and not the US, for assistance. North Korea wants to negotiate directly with the US to the exclusion of [South Korea]. Tensions exist because North Korea wants to communise the South and have a peace treaty with the US, to exclude the South from peace talks and to get all American troops out of the Korean Peninsula.

What about proof of South Korean goodwill? When there were floods in North Korea last year we gave them over 50,000 tons of rice to alleviate food shortages in the North. That cost us a lot of money. In return, they antagonised South Korea by capturing a religious missionary, who was [proselytising] in the neighbouring northern Chinese province of Manchuria. They also captured a ship that was transporting the rice and held the crew on trumped-up spying charges last year. If it is necessary to persevere with even more patience and magnanimity, the South will do so.

What about current talks between American and North Korean officials in Berlin? The talks deal with specific issues such as stopping missile proliferation and humanitarian concerns such as the attempts to recover the remains of American sol-

diers from the Korean War.

What about trading with Libya?

We have close economic links with Libya, but we do not trade in any military items. We support the UN resolutions on Libya. Our economic transactions with Libya are conducted within the framework of the UN resolutions. We are not breaking the UN sanctions.

And South Korean business interests in North Korea?

Yes we have business interests in North Korea. We need some kind of favourable environment in which to do more business there. The climate is not favourable for South Korean companies to operate without political prejudice in North Korea. It is a pity because South Korean companies have a lot to offer.

And China?

China is among China's biggest trading partners. China is a very important neighbour. Prospects for trade and investment look very bright.

And China's importance politically?

China occupies a very important position because it is in a position to give advice to North Korea — it has excellent working relations with China. China has been very helpful. We want to maintain good relations with China not just because of the problems in the Korean Peninsula but also for peace and prosperity in the whole of northeast Asia.

What about the anti-American demonstrations?

Korea has become a very democratic and open society; everyone is free to express his or her ideas. A small group of extremist activists wanted to score some publicity points by demonstrating against America. They were free to demonstrate.

On Clinton's visit

Clinton's visit was very timely and most opportune.

The view from the north

Badr Hassan Shafel sounded out Chang Sung Gil, the North Korean ambassador to Egypt

threat is an invention of the US and Western countries. They created the problem to stifle Korean socialism. Our people have chosen the socialist path, which is based on the *Juche* philosophy founded by the late Great Leader, former President Kim Il Sung. Concerning the nuclear issue, we have an experimental reactor for peaceful purposes owing to the lack of other energy sources like oil. The US and other Western countries ban exports to socialist countries of strategic materials and nuclear technology. Therefore, we have developed nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and we are self-reliant.

But the US signed an agreement with your country in 1994 concerning the nuclear programme. Yes, but the US worked to internationalise the Korean nuclear crisis to put pressure on us. However, it eventually agreed to enter bilateral negotiations and signed a nuclear agreement in October 1994. According to this agreement, the US promised to provide us with two light-water nuclear reactors. The US also promised to give us half a million tons of non-nuclear fuel every year until the

completion of the construction of the reactors. The US also agreed to stop the joint military Team Spirit exercises with South Korea in return for us freezing our peaceful programme to produce nuclear energy.

Was this agreement actually carried out?

Some items of the agreement have been carried out: for example, the US provision of non-nuclear fuel. The joint military exercises between the US and South Korea, however, have not stopped, but continued under different names. For the first time, South Korean troops went to America to carry out marine exercises last year.

As for us, we have already frozen our peaceful nuclear programme and there is an inspection team from the International Atomic Energy Agency supervising the process.

Will this crisis obstruct the implementation of the agreement? The matter is up to the US. If it reneges on its promise, we will have to defend ourselves. I would like to make it very clear that we want peace and security in the Korean Peninsula and we are en-

davouring to normalise relations with the US. But, we will not bend over backwards or beg [for American friendship]. In order to maintain peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula, we have made a three-point proposal. First, a tentative agreement should be signed to replace the armistice agreement, until a complete peace agreement is concluded. Second, a North Korean-American joint military body should be established to replace the Armistice Commission. And, third, direct negotiations should be held with the US concerning the two previous points, while the United Nations should be asked to carry out its resolution on the Korean Peninsula.

What is the UN's stand on the Korean crisis?

We want the UN to play its role as a neutral international organisation and carry out its 1975 resolution calling for the withdrawal of foreign troops from South Korea and the replacement of the armistice agreement with a peace agreement.

Do you see the possibility of armed conflict on the peninsula?

We want peace. We want unconditional peace. We do not want the Americans to set conditions. We want stability and peace on the Korean Peninsula as well as the normalisation of relations with the US. We urge the US to sign a permanent peace pact instead of the old armistice agreement.

What is the cause of the latest tension between the two Koreas? The main reason is American opposition to the reunification of the two Koreas and its breaking of the armistice agreement signed in 1953. The United States, ever since its troops set foot in South Korea in September 1945, has wanted its troops to be permanently stationed there and, further, to occupy the whole of the Korean Peninsula. The incidence of American violations of the 1953 armistice agreement [ending the 1950-53 Korean War] has increased sharply in the past few months. There have been 435,000 American violations in the last 10 years. Of the 63 paragraphs in the agreement, nine have been ignored and remain only on paper.

Is the crisis related to the US decision to halt rice supplies to North Korea? No. American aid is too little to be of any consequence. The US expressed its readiness to provide \$2 million of food aid to North Korea to ease food shortages [following last year's severe drought].

So, the crisis is related to North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons?

There are no nuclear weapons in our country. We have no intention to possess nuclear weapons, nor do we have the capability to produce nuclear weapons. The so-called North Korean nuclear

World leadership in the Clinton-Dole race

Immigration and terrorism are high on the list of American presidential election issues, writes **Thomas Gorguissian** from Washington

Immigration and terrorism top the agendas of the recently resumed sessions of both houses of Congress. These two issues, with their international and domestic repercussions, are definitely going to be part of the foreign affairs debate between Republicans and Democrats in the coming election season.

Recently Senator Robert Dole, the Senate majority leader and Republican presidential candidate, and Newt Gingrich, speaker of the Republican-dominated House of Representatives, called on three key committee chairmen to hold hearings on the covert Iranian arms shipments to Bosnia in 1994, which were reportedly approved by the Clinton administration. The issue was disclosed in a detailed report published by the *Los Angeles Times*. Republicans, it is expected, will use this opportunity to criticise sharply the administration's mishandling of international crises, using Bosnia as an example.

Another battleground in the coming elections will be the funding of so-called foreign operations, as well as the status of the bodies which manage those operations. Republicans believe that many of these operations have to be cut back, as a great deal of wastefulness and bureaucracy make them inefficient. The foreign assistance programme is also targeted for cuts.

Earlier this month, President Bill Clinton vetoed a bill that would have shrunk three main foreign affairs agencies and intensified pressure on China. The bill had passed through the Senate by 52 votes to 44 and through the House by 226 votes to 172 — not big enough margins to override Democrat Clinton's veto, the 14th in his presidency.

The president wrote in a message to Congress: "This legislation contains many unacceptable provisions that would undercut US leadership abroad and damage our ability to assure the future security and prosperity of the American people." In the same message, Clinton mentioned that the bill would "unacceptably restrict" his ability, as president, to conduct foreign affairs, which raised "serious constitutional concerns".

In the last two years, with the Republican dominance in the legislative body, Washington has witnessed a struggle between the two ends of Pennsylvania Avenue — the White House and Capitol Hill — over the funding of foreign affairs bodies and missions. The three agencies which the vetoed bill was targeting were the US Agency for International Development, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the US Information Agency.

The veto came two days before President Clinton began a trip to South Korea, Japan and Russia. Stability in the Korean Peninsula and nuclear safety were the main topics of discussion on his tour. Hot spots in the world arena will undoubtedly dominate the foreign policy debates in the coming presidential election campaigns. China, Russia, the Middle East, Bosnia, the United Nations and peacekeeping, and NATO expansion will receive the most attention.

Successes in foreign affairs may help sometimes in elections, but failures definitely damage the chances of the incumbent. The Clinton administration is anxious to avoid American casualties, especially body bags in Bosnia, to keep the peace process going in the Middle East, to have fairly good relations with Russia, to ensure it does not face any nuclear threat and to prevent a crisis erupting in the Korean Peninsula. In addition, the present administration is trying to prove the value — both in dollars and in jobs — of trade diplomacy in international markets.

Political observers believe that there are not that many differences between Clinton and Dole on foreign policy. So, what the strategists of Dole's camp will try to do is attack Clinton's character through his style and deeds in managing, or mismanaging, foreign affairs. Some of the adjectives which Dole's supporters have employed recently to describe Clinton and his policies are "inconsistent", "unstrategic", "reactive" and — the most frequently used — "indecisive".

Not taking strong stands on Russia and China is one of the main points on which the Clinton administration is criticised. Recent reports have indicated that Dole is now struggling to shape an Asia policy. In recent addresses about Asian policy he has had to weigh up whether to emphasise human rights or Beijing's strategic and trade importance to the US.

Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona is advising Dole on his upcoming Asia speech. According to some reports, a number of Bush and Reagan administration officials are helping to draft it. Among them are former UN Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick, former Assistant Secretary of Defence Richard Armitage, former Pentagon policy chief Paul Wolfowitz and former Undersecretary of State Robert Zoellick. Senator McCain's name was recently mentioned beside that of General Colin Powell's name as a possible secretary of state in a Dole administration.

Many in the Republican Party, and especially in the Dole camp, believe that Kirkpatrick is second to none in foreign policy issues and they see in her the best possible secretary of state. She was the US's first female ambassador to the UN, representing Ronald Reagan during such crises as the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, the American intervention in Grenada and the Soviet downing of a Korean plane.

In an interview with the conservative *Insight* magazine, Kirkpatrick said: "I think experience is the basis for prudent thinking and good judgement within the domain of international affairs, and that is one of the reasons I decided to endorse Bob Dole for president and join his campaign. We risked American lives and poured an awful lot of American money down various rat holes so that the Clinton administration could develop the broad capacity for conducting military operations out of the UN secretariat... Bob Dole wouldn't do [that]."

Senator Dole is critical of the American involvement in international peacekeeping operations. He believes that "US sovereignty must be defended, not delegated" via the UN, the World Trade Organisation and others. On many occasions he has said UN Secretary-General Boutros Ghali is not the one who is going to define American foreign policy. Dole has stated many times that "American lives should be risked only for American interests", and asked for American military power to be rebuilt. He also wrote, "Leadership is saying what you mean, meaning what you say, and sticking to it. That includes a willingness to use force when required."

As regards the Middle East, Senator Dole gained prominence last year more than ever before when on 13 October 1995 he, along with senators Moynihan, Kyl, Inouye and 61 others, introduced the Jerusalem Embassy Relocation Act. The Senate passed the bill by 93 votes to five. Dole justified his bill saying, "This legislation is not about the peace process — it is about recognising Israel's capital. Israel's capital is not on the table in the peace process, and moving the US embassy to Jerusalem does nothing to prejudice the outcome of any future negotiations."

The Senate majority leader in 1990 considered Congress to be acting irresponsibly when it passed resolutions calling for the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. In that same year, Senator Dole visited Baghdad and met Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein, just months before the invasion of Kuwait.

IRA blasts British proposals

Another bomb attack in London shows that the IRA is frustrated with the British stalling of all-party negotiations, writes **Faiza Rady**

On the night of 17 April, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) detonated a bomb in the posh West London neighbourhood of the Boltons. The explosion caused no casualties and only minimal property damage. It occurred in an area which is home to the rich and famous; residents include tabloid superstar and fashion model Liz Hurley and Baron and Baroness John and Anya Sainsbury.

This was the fifth device planted in the capital since the powerful explosion that blasted the Docklands area on 9 February and ended the IRA's 17-month ceasefire. The resumption of hostilities signalled the organisation's protest over the British government's stalling on the commencement of all-party negotiations about the future of Northern Ireland.

In the wake of the Docklands bomb, the British government seemingly responded to IRA demands when it finally scheduled all-party talks for 10 June. "The main IRA concern was to establish that the government would seriously engage with the peace process," explained political analyst David McKintick. "They wished to ensure that in the talks the odds would not be stacked against them, and that negotiations would not stall on the question of decommissioning IRA arms."

The Boltons incident clearly marked the IRA's rejection of the election proposal, occurring one day after the British government presented its legislative bill for the Northern Ireland elections, which are scheduled for 30 May. Mitchell McLaughlin, chairman of Sinn Fein, the political wing of the IRA, said the attack offered "continuing evidence that the IRA thought the proposal did not contain the necessary dynamics for a ceasefire". McLaughlin added that a ceasefire would only be implemented if Protestant politicians met Sinn Fein and agreed on an alternative to armed struggle.

According to British Prime Minister John Major's contested proposal, Ulster residents will be electing a 110-member forum representing 10

political parties — including Sinn Fein — which would then select negotiating teams for the long delayed all-party talks. However, Major, speaking during a visit to Prague a day after the explosion, categorically stated that there would be no part in the peace process for Sinn Fein unless and until it could produce a lasting and viable IRA ceasefire. Otherwise, negotiations would start "without the participation of Sinn Fein and those people who support bombing exercises like [that of 17 April]", said Major.

Besides the IRA/Sinn Fein opposition, John Hume's Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) — the largest Catholic party in Northern Ireland — disagrees with the election format and its forum, which it believes is designed to contain a Protestant majority. Clashing with British politicians during the House of Commons debate on the subject, the SDLP proposed amendments which would minimise the forum's role.

At the same time, Protestant politicians representing David Trimble's Ulster Unionist Party — which promotes continued union with Britain — pushed for amendments to be passed that would strengthen the forum's executive powers. Commenting on the clashes over the bill, a spokesperson for the British Embassy in Cairo told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "the current proposals are balanced and therefore give no one party everything it wants".

Beyond the election bill debate and the latest IRA bombing, negotiations between the Republicans and the Unionists have faltered on the question of decommissioning the IRA's weapons. After the much-touted February 1995 joint British-Irish *New Framework for Agreement* broadly outlined negotiation guidelines, the British government suddenly demanded that all militias disarm as a precondition for negotiations.

Neither the *New Framework* nor the Irish and British governments' historic December 1993 declaration of intention to seek a political solution with Sinn Fein and other parties, required

the factions to disarm. According to the declaration's text, the two governments agreed that peace can only be achieved by ending violence so that "democratically elected political parties, committed to using exclusively peaceful methods and having demonstrated their acceptance of the democratic process, will be free to fully participate and, in due time, join the dialogue between the governments and the political parties."

Only after the historic 1994 IRA ceasefire agreement did the Major administration refer to the necessity of disarmament. Although neither the IRA/Sinn Fein nor the pro-British loyalist factions disagree with the principle of eventual decommissioning, the IRA rejects preconditions other than those proposed in the declaration and *New Framework* texts and wants to include decommissioning on the negotiation agenda.

But why should disarmament be such a point of contention for the IRA? According to Ireland specialist Pierre Joannon, it is important to remember that the IRA emerged in its present form in 1970 as a self-defence militia for the protection of Irish nationalist neighbourhoods — which were regularly assaulted by rioting Protestant gangs, while an indifferent police force stood by and often collaborated with the gangs. Moreover, the problem of the IRA's illegal use of weapons has to be seen in the wider context of the thousands of legal arms carried by members of the Protestant community. These still potentially threaten the Catholics. "It is only negotiations that will render self-defence needs obsolete. At least this is what one should hope for, and this is one of the reasons why the IRA refuses to disarm before negotiations," wrote Joannon.

With negotiations stalled on the question of decommissioning, John Major and his Irish counterpart John Bruton decided last November to refer the issue to an international commission, headed by former US Senator George Mitchell and including Harri Holkeri, former prime min-

ister of Finland, and General John de Chastelain, the Canadian army chief-of-staff to make recommendations. In January, Senator Mitchell handed his report to the British and Irish governments.

According to the commission's findings, the problem of disarmament is only a symptom masking an underlying deep and mutual distrust. "We have concluded that the paramilitary organisations will not disarm before negotiations start," reads the report. The commission consequently recommends that disarmament take place during negotiations, but prior to the conclusion of a peace agreement. As for eventual elections, the report states that they should reflect a wide-ranging consensus to support a global solution to the conflict in Northern Ireland. The report also suggests that all parties should demonstrate their "willingness to take risks for peace".

In reference to the Mitchell report, the British Embassy in Cairo's spokesperson told the *Weekly* that the "government has accepted the report" and, consequently, "at the beginning of negotiations all participants will have to make clear their total commitment to democracy and non-violence as well as address the report's proposal on decommissioning".

Most Republicans, however, think otherwise. "[They] have concluded that John Major is in the business of making concessions to the Ulster Unionist Party in the hope of securing its support in the common lobbies," commented the *Independent* newspaper. The Prime Minister's internal political situation is currently so embattled that he cannot afford to take risks, explained Joannon. His parliamentary majority is so slim that he has to comply with the demands of the nine Unionist members of parliament in return for their backing. As a result, "Major lauded the Mitchell Report, while effectively ignoring the essential recommendation to decommission during negotiations," wrote Joannon.



A old woman waves a portrait of the founder of the Soviet Union Vladimir Lenin, and joins other Communist supporters as they march into Red Square, Moscow, on 22 April to mark the 126th anniversary of Lenin's birth. The Communist candidate for president, Gennady Zyuganov is leading in opinion polls for the 16 June Russian presidential elections (photo: Reuters)

Race and the workplace

Keith Jennings assembles the fragments that constitute racism among the jobless and in the workplace in America

It was the disastrous economic policies of former United States presidents, Ronald Reagan and George Bush, that have contributed most to the current global economic crisis. In the US the neo-conservative attack on the Keynesian welfare state in reality amounted to a domestic structural adjustment programme. Characteristically, this programme included a redistribution of the wealth in society: the income of the richest one per cent of the population grew by 74 per cent during the 1980s while that of the poorest 40 per cent of the population fell or showed no growth.

In the area of taxes, a shifting tax burden from the rich to the poor and middle classes made the redistribution cited above possible. The redistribution of the tax burden provided \$25,000 to each family in the upper one per cent. During the 1980s, payroll taxes, which are regressive and fall entirely on labour income, increased faster than any other federal tax.

The emergence of mass unemployment, underemployment and increasingly fierce competition for jobs and the liquidation and privatisation of businesses and services have collectively led to a swelling of the army of those deprived of a job, housing, health care and education.

In the US, contemporary manifestations of racism and racial discrimination are often couched in reactionary public policies. For most policymakers racism is a thing of the past. And when it is to be discussed, the focus should only be on alleged "reverse discrimination" which supposedly discriminates against white males. Scapagoating African Americans, people of Latin American descent (Latinos), Asian Americans, Arab Americans and Third World immigrants has become a popular pastime for the mainstream politicians. This new racism is more difficult to detect and is often in need of "decoding". A good example of this phenomenon is legislation entitled the Equal Opportunities Act of 1996, which is being debated presently in the Congress. The legislation, if passed, will eliminate all affirmative action programmes in the US.

The act does not even acknowledge the existence of past or present — of sexual or racial discrimination in the country. This piece of legislation, in reality, is designed to protect the white-skin privilege that has existed in the US since

its founding. The chief sponsor of the legislation is Republican presidential candidate, Senator Bob Dole. In the US there are 130 million jobs and about 90 million of them involve repetitive tasks, which means that a computer can displace them. There should be no doubt that the economic situation exerts a substantial influence on the stratification of societies. Its influence, for instance, can readily be seen on the state of employment and therefore on the level of unemployment, where factories are located, how long people will work, what type of work people will engage in and under what conditions that work will be performed.

Like most industrialised countries the US is experiencing a growing level of unemployment. Because of the changing economy and increasingly open measures of racial discrimination, rates of unemployment among national minorities and indigenous peoples are appallingly high. This is especially true for young people.

The official unemployment rate in the US is 5.6 per cent. For African American adults it is officially 15.9 per cent. For African American youth, however, it is 40 per cent. The rate of unemployment among Latinos is approximately 17 per cent and among Native Americans it averages 46 per cent — data often is not kept but it is known that on some reservations unemployment ranges as high as 70 per cent. These official rates must be understood against the reality of hundreds of thousands of people who have given up looking for work and are therefore not counted in official data. For instance, the real rate of unemployment for African Americans is 26 per cent and for African American youth, 58 per cent.

The misery, pain and suffering brought on by unemployment can be seen on any US street, with African American homeless people increasingly begging for food, work or money.

Maintaining sanity and a sense of dignity in a racist society is often made more difficult by the growing impoverishment associated with the marginalisation of communities of colour. The changing

in the job market coupled with racial discrimination have led to an unprecedented marginalisation of the black working class. In fact, the Urban Institute, in a seminal report on employment discrimination, noted that racism in employment is still widespread in the US: African Americans are three times as likely as whites to face discrimination when applying for entry-level jobs. The depressed US economy and global restructuring have meant that workers with little education cannot find decent paying jobs. Others who have found new jobs in the service sector typically receive lower wages, and most of these jobs normally do not provide medical insurance or decent fringe benefits.

The federal government policy of cutbacks and corporate downsizing has exacerbated the worsening employment conditions. For instance, during the 1980s the federal minimum wage was frozen at \$3.35 per hour. This policy expanded the working poor. Thousands of persons working full time cannot afford the basic necessities of life. Not able to participate in the economy in any meaningful way many in the black working class have opted to participate in the

underground economy or turn their heads while their children do so.

The rate of poverty has grown tremendously over the past decade for all population groups. However, its increase has been most marked among people of colour. Recent figures have suggested a steady growth in poverty among the most vulnerable sectors of the US population. Underpinning all of the aforementioned social, economic and cultural rights violations is the absence of governmental policy to ensure that all citizens, especially those national minority and indigenous groups which were historically discriminated against, are able to enjoy a decent standard of living in accordance with internationally established human rights standards. Living below the poverty line is by definition the inability of families to meet their basic needs. The fact that half of all young African American families have incomes below the poverty level is indicative of not only the failure but also the betrayal of democracy in the US.

Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

The writer is the executive director of the African American Human Rights Foundation

Going for 7% growth

By Ahmed Galal

The immediate challenge facing the Egyptian economy today is to raise the growth rate of the GDP from the current level of two to four per cent. Without higher growth rates it will be difficult to generate the employment opportunities necessary to raise the standard of living for the population at large.

Higher growth rate requires doing three things: (1) boosting the investment rate from about 17 per cent of GDP to at least 25-27 per cent. (2) securing corresponding increases in savings, both domestic and foreign, to finance the increased investment, and (3) invigorating the efficiency of the capital stock-current and new. All this must be achieved without compromising financial stability and social equity.

Higher investment needs to be financed by higher savings. Domestic savings can come from the private sector, the government sector, or the public enterprise sector. Experience has shown that the response of private sector savings in the short run is uncertain both in magnitude and duration. Similarly, the scope for higher government savings is limited. Government savings would require higher taxes or lower expenditure. Higher taxes would be inconsistent with efforts to induce investment. The scope for reducing government expenditure is narrow, given that real wages of the civil service were eroded in the past and the unemployment rate in the country is high. In addition, cuts in expenditures on health and education do not appear consistent with long-term growth, let alone caring for the well being of the poor. Finally, the budget will, in any event, have to compensate for the planned tariff cuts that could cost LE1.5 billion annually.

This leaves the public enterprise sector as the main source of higher domestic savings. Savings in this case could come both from improved efficiency of the companies that are transferred to private control and from the liquidation of the loss-making companies. Together these could fetch about two percentage points of GDP in higher savings, as demonstrated under similar circumstances in India. Additional savings could be generated from fuller capacity utilisation — given the existing slack in the economy and reforming the pension funds, but the volume of these savings is unknown.

On the other hand, we know that investment over domestic savings is equal to the current account deficit. The question, therefore, is how the current account deficit could be financed. Possible sources of financing are: (1) running down reserves, (2) borrowing from abroad, or (3) attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). Reserves are currently \$18 billion, equal to an 18-month import cover. A target of a 12-month cover could give some room to run down reserves to about \$15 billion (which could be the average import level as growth picks up). But this can only provide a one-off source of savings (of, say, four to five per cent of GDP). Borrowing from abroad, though feasible to some degree, could add to the debt service burden in the future (the current level of foreign debt is about \$32 billion, or 60 per cent of GDP).

This leaves FDI as the most likely candidate for providing additional savings in the next few years. But the policy effort required to attract FDI is considerable. Of the 10 percentage points needed to boost investment, about 50 per cent would have to be financed by FDI. This would amount to about LE10 billion.

Increasing investment requires first of all a stable policy environment, which is in place, and financial stability which is also in place. In addition to maintaining a prudent macroeconomic policy, increasing savings and investment require a consistent set of incentives and lower transactions costs (e.g., less bureaucratic intervention) than offered elsewhere. To move in this direction, Egypt could adopt the following actions:

— Privatisation. Done right, privatisation would increase the efficiency of utilising existing capital stock. It would stop the flow of resources to unviable enterprises, and signal the withdrawal of government from activities in which the private sector can do a better job. More importantly, privatisation would increase private investment and attract FDI.

While early actions could include the privatisation of the 16 companies currently traded on the stock market, attracting foreign direct investment requires "landmark" privatisation. In other words, privatisation would have to be widened to encompass infrastructure, particularly telecommunications and port services. As in Chile and Mexico, the buyers of these concerns should be obliged to invest to meet pending and growing demand. Beside generating new investment, this would permit a fuller utilisation of redundant workers.

For privatisation in infrastructure to be successful, it should be preceded by introducing competition in potentially competitive markets, unbundling existing companies, adopting appropriate regulatory rules (for example, with respect to prices and interconnection) and creating genuinely independent regulatory bodies. Beside clarifying the rules of the game, regulation would both protect the consumers and guarantee the private sector a fair rate of return on efficient operation.

In all cases, the revenue from privatisation should be used to retire public debt. This will relieve the government budget from the burden of servicing the debt and will partly compensate for the loss in reserves from trade reform. The proceeds should not be used to restructure public enterprises; the new buyers of such enterprises are more capable of doing that. Part of the proceeds could be used, however, to compensate displaced workers.

— Investment Policies. Stimulation of investment needs further simplification of the investment law. However, this simplification should not be pursued by giving multiple and distorting incentives for all variety of reasons that are hard to implement fairly, as envisaged in the current draft company law (or investment law). Rather, it could be pursued by further reduction and unification of corporate tax rates (say to 30 per cent), and providing infrastructure in locations deserving promotion. Inducing investment could also be pursued effectively by tax administration reform, with a view to reducing discretion in implementation.

To offset the reductions in corporate tax rates, efforts should be made to modernise the tax system and make up for the inevitable loss in revenues from trade reform (see below). Modernisation of the tax system and moving quickly on VAT (value added tax) will widen the tax base, and thus enhance revenue.

— Trade Reform. Egypt's tariffs are very high (up to 70 per cent plus a surcharge of five per cent) and higher than regional partners. Efficiency gains as well as the shift of resources into export sectors require a gradual pre-announced lowering of tariffs in order to expose domestic firms to international competition. Free zones, tax holidays, and other selective liberalisation will not help. The objective must be, taking into account the constraints, to convert the whole country into a free zone or close to one. More uniform tariffs and tariff reductions must be introduced, given the evolving regional environment and the imminent conclusion of the free trade negotiations with the EU. In this regard, it would be desirable to announce and implement tariff reform, involving a move to a 50 per cent maximum tariff immediately and 30 per cent in a few years.

— Financial Policy. Sound monetary policy implies that growth of money supply should not exceed the growth rate of nominal GDP. In the past 12 months, money supply, broadly defined, grew 9.11 per cent, which is below real GDP growth (4.7) added to inflation (13.7). Hence a cautious and moderate acceleration in money supply would be consistent with a current account deficit target of below 4 per cent, as well as the goal of increasing capacity utilisation.

Accordingly, the government could: (1) adopt a more flexible approach in meeting private sector demand for credit, and (2) reduce tariffs on a wider list of capital goods, for example to 5 per cent. The increase in credit supply could be pursued primarily by purchasing back the treasury bills to inject more liquidity into the economy.

— Exchange Rate Policy. While there may be some merits in maintaining the policy of using the exchange rate as a nominal anchor of reform, this policy is not sustainable in the medium run. It eventually reduces the competitiveness of exports, encourages consumption by increasing imports, thus lowering domestic savings, investment and growth. Moreover, as the economy approaches fuller employment, fixing the exchange rate means that domestic prices will rise, which will further erode the value of the real exchange rate.

For the above reasons, it is important that the government addresses the exchange rate issue sooner rather than later, especially as the delay would make it harder to adjust. In this regard, the government could move gradually from a fixed exchange rate regime to a crawling peg regime, whereby the Egyptian pound is linked to a set of hard currencies. This transition from using the nominal exchange rate as a nominal anchor to a more flexible exchange rate has been adopted by other countries, e.g. the Czech Republic.

Credibility, comprehensiveness and consistency are prerequisites for success.

The above set of policies should be pursued in a credible, comprehensive and consistent fashion to be successful. The policy initiatives have to be credible to evoke a standard investor response (especially from foreign investors) and overcome cynicism bred by years of patchy implementation and wavering commitment. They have to be comprehensive to signal that the effort is not selective or piecemeal and, therefore, less prone to reversibility. Finally, they have to be consistent to ensure that they can be implemented without being derailed by internal contradictions.

The writer is acting executive director of the Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies.

Expat money coming back home?

Egyptian expatriate businessmen are finding better opportunities to invest back home, but Nevine Wahish reports, some obstacles still remain

Nasser Abdel-Hamid has been living in Austria for 13 years. Along with several Egyptian partners, he owns one of Austria's most popular pizzerias. Today Abdel-Hamid and his partners are processing the paperwork needed to open a branch of their pizzeria in Cairo. "This is just a trial to test the Egyptian market. If all goes well, we will definitely expand our business," he said.

Government incentives for investors are "more than satisfactory," according to Abdel-Hamid. However, he complained that the process is slow due to uncooperative government employees who do not realise the importance of the incentives. "It is not enough [for the government] to simply issue decrees. The government should make sure that they are being implemented properly," he said.

Earlier this year, the government issued a series of decrees targeted at promoting investment. Foremost among them was the decision to allow investors to set up projects, regardless of how much capital they use, by simply informing the General Authority for Investment (GAI) and not waiting for licenses. The decrees also cut customs on capital goods and stipulated that no new tariffs or increases in current tariffs are to be charged except through amendments to the current law. Another important incentive was the distribution of desert land at token value.

Encouraging investment is a key part of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's economic reform programme. Officials consider reform essential to boosting the country's economic performance, providing jobs, increasing incomes and improving individual standards of living.

Abdel-Hamid believes that if incentives for investment are exploited properly, a goldmine awaits investors in Egypt. He cites Egypt's large population as a great asset: a country

with strong purchasing power accordingly enjoys increased production.

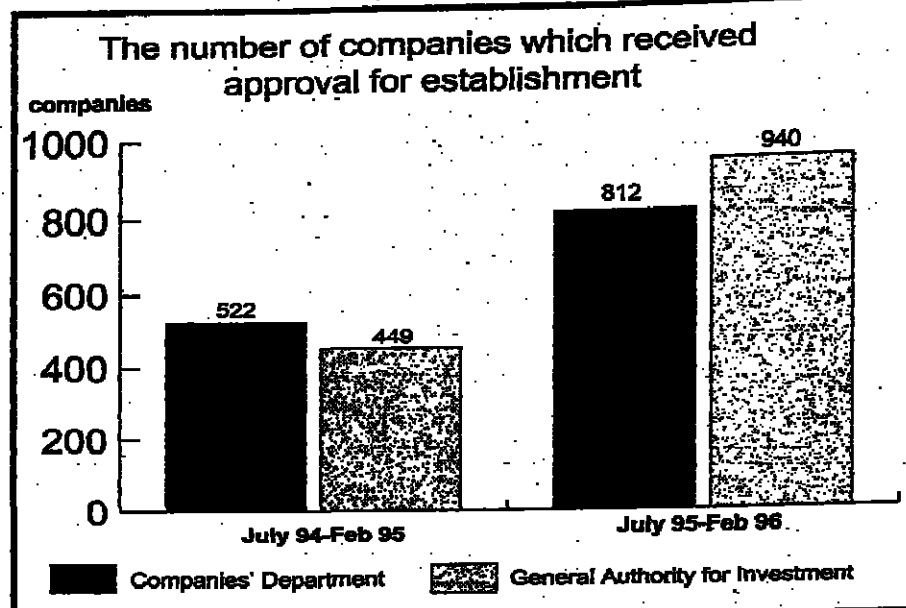
Badr Mabrouk, a ground water consultant working with an Egyptian-Saudi joint-venture company involved in ozone gas production for the sterilisation of water, agreed that the current incentive decrees are very encouraging. But like Abdel-Hamid, he said that government employees who are in direct contact with investors need to be kept abreast of the importance of these incentives and speed up the process.

An employee who is used to a certain routine will not change overnight. "Usually they are afraid to make a mistake, so they just make life difficult for the investor," said Mabrouk. However, Mabrouk was optimistic that this problem is bound to ease in the long run.

Saad Ghanem, principal associate of a Canadian business consultancy company, described the investment incentives as "fantastic, and better than those offered in Canada, but they need to be packaged and marketed properly." But Ghanem said that the incentives are not producing the results they should. "Considering the facilities the government is granting, more investors should be tapping the Egyptian market," he said.

He also cited the need to actively market these incentives. "Many people are not aware of Egypt's location advantage because it is not promoted enough," Ghanem explained, adding that investors are attracted to any market if they know they will make money. They simply need to be directed through professional training, Ghanem believes.

Maher Abu Basha, president of the General Federation of Expatriate Egyptians, noted vast improvements in the system. "Investment today is much easier than it was in



the past," he said. He especially praised the fact that investors no longer have to wait for approval for licences from an endless number of government bodies.

Another decree which he said he believed was of particular importance was the decision announced last week by Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali at the Fourth Conference for Expatriate Egyptian Businessmen and Investors, to grant land to investors free-of-charge in Upper Egypt. "This will push investors to start developing an area which has been neglected for hundreds of years," noted Abu Basha.

Abu Basha, however, had one reservation.

In his opinion, the government should not have given equal incentives to all sectors, because this gives investors the opportunity to tap the fields that will earn them the most profit in the shortest time. He pointed out that at the moment, most investors put their money into consumer industries which are the quickest in profit turnover.

Abu Basha suggested Egypt encourage investment in technological industries and redirect investors to other untapped sectors. "The government can do this by providing a proper infrastructure, especially transportation because movement is the backbone of trade," he said.

Environment friendly business

At a seminar last week, local and foreign experts agreed that increasing pollution is affecting economic output. Reem Leila attended

The effect of pollution on the economy was the centre of discussion last week in a seminar on Environmental Economics for Sustainable Development sponsored by UNESCO, the World Bank and the Centre for Environment and Development for the Arab Region and Europe. This seminar is an introduction to the training course taking place in Aswan from 15-23 April, 1996.

Environmental costs climb either through damage caused by resource exploitation or through the efforts exerted to redress this damage. In the last two decades, several studies have been undertaken to identify the harm caused by environmental pollution.

According to Mustafa Tolba, head of the International Centre for Environment and Development, air, water and noise pollution in the Netherlands from 1992 to 1995 cost the country an estimated 0.5 to 0.9 per cent of its gross domestic product. In Germany from 1991 to 1994, six per cent of the GDP was eaten up by such damage. Over the last seven years, 3.4 per cent of Egypt's GDP has been lost because of pollution.

Many of the socio-economic, physical and biological consequences of large development projects are inadequately known and some of them cannot be quantified. "When landscapes or historic monuments are threatened with irreversible change, it becomes hard to set a price tag on the damage, even if all consequences could be enumerated and their likelihood assessed," explained Tolba.

Studies on pollution generally calculate the expense of dealing directly with such problems as air and water pollution and waste management. The figures rarely take account of the economic impact of lost natural resources and damaged environments. The studies show the cost of action, but not that of inaction. The cost of fighting pollution in developed countries, according to Hanna Kheirredin, professor of economics at Cairo University, ranges from 0.8 to 1.5 per cent of GDP. In developing countries the figure is lower — between 0.1 and 0.4 per cent.

According to John Page, chief economist at the World Bank, preventing and repairing environmental damage often involves foregoing today's tangible economic benefits for tomorrow's intangible ones. The expenses are generally more than compensated for by later benefits, he said. It has been estimated that the net benefit of controlling air and water pollution in developed countries is equivalent to \$26 billion a year.

In developing countries, improved sewage and water facilities could reduce the incidence of infectious diseases by 50 to 60 per cent. "This improvement in human health would not only increase productivity and time on the job — both of which add to GDP — but also cut expenditure on medical goods and services. In

Egypt, there are 90 to 270 days of restricted work per year as a result of pollution," said Page.

The increase in pollution severely affects the productivity of agricultural lands. Globally, about six million hectares of productive land are lost every year to advancing deserts, while another 21 million are reduced to a state of infertility. The resulting losses in agricultural products add up to some \$42 billion a year.

Page believes that stopping these losses by holding back the desert would cost \$2-6 billion per year — above what is already being spent — over a period of 20 years. Unfortunately, the returns for investors would only appear in the long term.

According to Adnan Shehabeddin, regional director of UNESCO in Cairo, countries use several economic instruments to protect the environment. Subsidies, in the form of grants, loans and tax allowances, encourage practices which pollute less. Deposit refund schemes encourage cans and bottles to be reused.

"The huge debt burden and the economic problems of developing countries present a major obstacle to the introduction of such economic instruments," said Shehabeddin. International organisations should, he suggests, provide these countries with the funds and experts needed to reduce or eliminate the sources of pollution.

Parliament backs Ganzouri's reforms

The People's Assembly gave the thumbs-up for the government's future economic plans. Gamal Essam El-Din followed the debate

Following two weeks of debate on the policy statement Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri delivered last January after forming his cabinet, the People's Assembly (PA) renewed its confidence in his government and approved his programme.

Addressing the PA at the end of the debate, Ganzouri stressed that economic reform is Egypt's only means of solving its chronic problems and raising the national growth rate.

Ganzouri argued that international economic reports almost unanimously point to the fact that Egypt is on its way to joining the ranks of Southeast Asia's seven economic tigers thanks to tremendous investment incentives provided by the newly-elected government. He also emphasised the important role that the privatisation programme plays in improving the condition of the public sector.

Ganzouri declared that the government will work to promote social development and services, adding that out of the LE77.4 billion earmarked for the 1996/97 budget, LE22.8 billion will be set aside for salaries and pensions, and LE27 billion will be channelled towards education and health services. And, ruling out that any additional taxes or tariffs would be levied, he said that the state will subsidise low-rent housing and basic food commodities. In the meantime, he noted, "the state will do its best to keep the budget deficit as low as 1.5 per cent of the gross domestic product."

Another issue to be tackled by the government, said Ganzouri, is the improvement of public utilities and services. He said that the government will allocate LE25 billion this year to improve national sewage systems and drinking water projects.

Responding to demands by MPs that rural areas be provided with electricity, Ganzouri stated that so far around 6,181 villages have been linked to the national

power grid, while another 3,500 small villages will be connected next year.

The government, he declared, will concentrate on the completion of national projects such as that in Sinai. For this project, he said, the government has allocated around LE1.7 billion. In addition, two other projects for the development of Upper Egypt and the rural areas will be launched soon. The government, Ganzouri noted, has already spent LE1.2 billion to upgrade services in 525 shanty towns in 11 governorates.

In the meantime, the government has taken clear steps towards alleviating the chronic housing shortage by issuing a new housing law that places new housing units under the arm of civil law. Accordingly, the rental price of new apartments will be left to the forces of supply and demand.

Reviewing the government's plans to combat unemployment, Ganzouri said the solution lies in the hands of the citizens. But, he said, the government is doing its best to create 450,000 new job opportunities annually by setting up new investment projects. "There is no other solution except to open up new investment opportunities, a trend which characterises the government's policy initiatives in the next few years," he said.

Touching on the issue of privatisation, Ganzouri noted that the government is already shouldering a tremendous burden and should not also be obliged to administer the public sector.

"When these enterprises were nationalised in the 1960s, social services accounted for only LE500,000," he said. "But in the 1970s, they accounted for LE1.5 billion of the budget." The mounting financial burden of running the public sector, stated Ganzouri, is no longer acceptable. "We know which are the strategic units, which can be put up for public subscription and to whom they will be sold," he stated.

Market report

Easter recovery

EASTER brought with it a long-awaited recovery for the General Market Index (GMI) last week. The index witnessed a fractional increase of 0.92 points, reaching 200.82 during the three-day working period ending 18 April. Fuelled by these gains, the volume of the market turnover increased to LE50.3 million, compared to LE36.6 million the previous week.

The upward trend extended to the manufacturing sector index which chalked up 1.79 points and continued to increase, closing at 263.61. Marking the highest increase in share value, the Lebanese Egyptian Ceramics Company (LECECO) ended at 43.74 per cent higher, closing at LE38.00 per share. Alexandria Portland Cement gained LE5.03, stabilising at LE370.03 a share.

Despite these gains, shares of 12 of the sector's companies lost ground during the week. Paints and Chemical Industries Company shouldered a loss of LE5 a share to close at LE610. Egypt International for Pharmaceutical Industries lost LE4.99 to close at LE110.

The financial sector gained 0.33 points, closing at 204.51. Misr International Bank (MIBank) picked up LE5 to close at LE265 while the Commercial International Bank (CIB) edged higher, gaining LE0.99 and closing at LE442.99.

Shares of Misr Exterior Bank were the most active shares of the market, gathering about 18 per cent of total market transactions. Though LE5.2 million of its shares changed hands, shares closed at the same opening level of LE520. The Gulf Arab Investment Company captured 41.95 per cent of the total market turnover, trading 319,881 shares and losing 0.05 a share to end at LE1.

Overall, 19 of the companies participating in the market transactions this week saw gains. But shares of 21 companies slipped while 27 remained unchanged.

Edited by Ghada Ragab

Lisez dans

En vente tous les mercredis

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- ☐ Raids israéliens au Liban
L'horreur et la colère
- ☐ Youssef Boutros-Ghali
Les privatisations financeront le social
- ☐ Attentat du Caire
Une attaque longuement planifiée
- ☐ Enquête sur le Sinaï
Zone militaire ou terre d'investissements ?

☐ Aid
Le pèlerinage et le partage

☐ Issa Hayatou
Le football africain sur la bonne voie

Rédacteur en Chef
Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président
et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

Al-Ahram: A Diwan of contemporary life

"It was not an easy path that led toward the landmark year of 1897. It began nearly 100 years previously, on 11 January 1801 to be precise. On this date, recorded in the famous chronicles of Abdel-Rahman El-Jabarti, the commanding officer from the French camp, Abdallah Jacques Minon, sent a letter to the Egyptian chancery, in which he said, 'Venerable sheikhs and honorable ulamas, reputed for your knowledge and wisdom, you are well aware that the finest qualities a regime can have in the proper organisation of all our affairs on earth is to cherish and elevate systematic organisation in keeping with the design which emanates from the wisdom of God on high.' The envoy then reminded the officials of Napoleon Bonaparte's orders to 'draw up a ledger containing the full names of all the deceased' as well as another ledger containing the names of all the births, 'for I must devote considerable attention to these two matters.' In addition, he also requested 'a third ledger containing the details of all marriages, as such constitute the most significant of life's events and religious duties.' Following this, 'innumerable changes will be effected in the organisation as concerns specifying property ownership, births and deaths, the details of which shall be learned from the inhabitants of every home.'"

Then, to convince the Egyptian officials of the importance and logic of such statistics, he concludes, 'Thus will the religious courts be able to rule, justly and fairly, so as to resolve disputes and contention over inheritance and to determine lineage, which is the weightiest and most prevalent means for determining rights of inheritance.'"

However, this attempt never bore fruit. It would have required an enormous amount of time, which, since the French departed less than six months later, was not at their disposal. Even the statistics provided in the well-known compendium completed after the French returned home, *La Description de l'Egypte*, were founded primarily on customs documents, the archives of the religious courts and personal eye-witness testimony.

However, the course of history did not stop with the French, and the demands for a census would evolve concurrently with the process of building the modern state. The foundations of the modern state were put into place in the first half of the 19th century and were entrenched and diversified in the second half. During this period, the country made its transition from a feudal economy to a national economy. Self-sufficient feudal holdings and a barter economy yielded to the conversion to cash crop production, the emergence of a national market and the convergence onto the international market.

Perhaps this development contributed to the rise among the Europeans in Egypt — foreign consuls, official envoys and travellers — of interest in population statistics. One of the best known reports is that of Dr. Boring, whom the British government sent to Egypt in 1836. His report was replete with statistics, one of which was that, while the Egyptian government estimated the population at 3.2 million, other experts estimated it at anywhere between two and two and a half million.

The formation of a modern army was another development that would call for a census. Earlier attempts at building a modern army were both arbitrary and despotic. Frequently, young men would simply be rounded up from one village or another and dragged into the military. This forced conscription reached its peak in the 1830s, during Egypt's campaigns in Syria draining the country of approximately half of its productive labour force and debilitating the growing national economy.

Nevertheless, several factors persisted to impede

precise population statistic gathering: ingrained traditions, an inherent fear of government, not to mention the more recent military recruitment measures. "No Entry" was the unwritten sign posted on Egyptian homes. This was particularly the case in the cities, where the harem system, adopted from the Turks, gave the home a special sanctity. Visitors, particularly men, could not traverse the threshold of the home unless they were accompanied by the master of the house and then they never went beyond the first floor reception area known as the *salamluk*. It followed, therefore, that access to information on members of the household was also forbidden. In fact, if it were to leak out, it would often constitute a defamation of the master of the house's honour. As a consequence, Egyptians would not willingly offer what they would consider private information to strangers, and even more so to government officials, as they learned through bitter experience.

For centuries, Egyptians had been the target of a variety of forms of official plunder. In the cities they feared the representatives of the Ottoman Sultan, the Mamluk knights and the army recruiters.

In the countryside, the Egyptian peasant was pursued by the Ottoman tax collectors, who performed their task with a diabolical thoroughness, barely leaving the fallah the clothes on his back. European consuls reported back to their capitals that the Egyptian population, which, "in the era of the remote past" as they put it, exceeded 8 million, was reduced to a quarter of that figure by the end of the Ottoman era. Were it not for the practice of polygamy ("Egyptian women are noted for their fertility," they noted), the number would have been far less. Dr. Boring remarks that even some Copts in remote villages in the provinces practiced polygamy.

Finally, national military service conscription policies had a disastrous effect on statistics gathering. In addition to the customary recourse of fleeing or self-mutilation to escape the draft, government leaders had a curious way of vanishing, regardless of their ultimate purpose.

In light of the above, it is not surprising that Mohamed Ali's first attempts to conduct a national census in 1830 failed. According to a British report, the failure was due to the people's "solidarity in their resistance to authority, not just among the lower classes, but among individuals of the highest stature, even those on close terms with the Pasha himself."

Alternatives had to be found. The first solution was to take up where the French had left off, and the spread of census ledgers throughout the country became one of the tangible manifestations of the tightening grip of centralised authority. The process, according to a contemporary observer, "will help the government formulate a conjecture as to the number of the country's inhabitants, that is a closer approximation to the truth."

Edward Lane, in his *Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* (1836) tells us of another alternative that was pursued. "A few years ago," he writes, "a calculation was made founded on the number of houses in Egypt, and the supposition that the inhabitants of each house in the metropolis amount to eight persons and in the provinces to four." Although Lane believed that the calculation offered an approximation of the truth, he expressed certain reservations. "Personal observation and inquiry incline me to think that the houses of such towns as Alexandria, Boulog and Mass El-Adigh (Old Cairo) contain each, on the average, five persons. Rashid is half deserted, but as to the crowded town of Damietta, we must reckon with as many as six persons to each house."

A third solution was to have the village sheikhs

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1897 was a pivotal year for Egyptians. This was when the

first national census was conducted, marking Egypt's entry into the age of population statistics. It also established a tradition that lasted 70 years — that the census would take place in the seventh year of every decade. When the ill-fated June War occurred in 1967, however, a less portentous year had to be found. In this instalment of his chronicles of Egypt's history based on reports published in *Al-Ahram*, Dr Yunan Labib Rizq tells the story

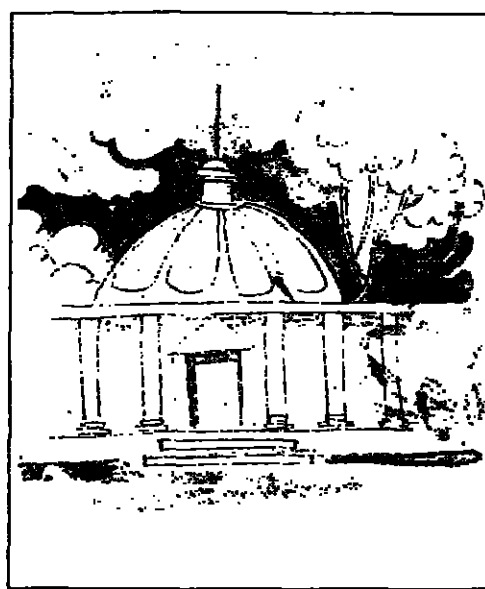


Illustration: Makram Heneli

keep a ledger in which they recorded all the names, births and deaths of the inhabitants. This process, too, was very imprecise. Many of the sheikhs were illiterate, the coincidence of high birth rates and high infant mortality rates led to confusion, and more importantly, the sheikhs tampered with the information, for reasons of personal gain and influence. Penalties for this infraction could reach as high as a year in prison, a principle that was supported by an *Al-Ahram* article which says, "To penalise sheikhs for not producing or concealing the names of those who are of military age is very just, for those persons are registered in the birth and death ledgers for which the sheikhs are responsible and it is, therefore, impossible for a name to be omitted or dropped unless the sheikhs, for some ulterior purpose, have deliberately done so."

However, compulsion alone would not guarantee an accurate census. Other measures were required, notably those that were introduced in the 1890s when Egypt's first population census was conducted. *Al-Ahram* took part in the public relations campaign launched at the outset of that decade in order to convince the populace of the benefits that a proper census would bring to the government and themselves. The government would be able to achieve much if accurate population statistics were at its disposal. "It would know the exact numbers and classifications of tax payers, which will enable it to determine the national wealth, improve health and sanitary conditions and modify safety and security precautions. It will also help the government to contain and ameliorate the problems that arise from the increase in the population and to determine the diverse conditions around the country and the causes that propel some people to leave one area for another, thereby enabling the government to redress the imbalance by increasing the potential for income and prosperity in the former," *Al-Ahram* wrote.

As for the advantages in store for the public, the newspaper said, "People will not have to proceed arbitrarily in their trade or commerce, for they will be able to import or to manufacture what they can afford and to extend branches of their businesses to many regions that are virtually deprived of modern

manufactures and commercial benefits."

One important reason for citizens to accept the notion of a census, according to the newspaper, was to "believe the accusation levelled against us by foreigners who are astounded that we and our government can live in a country that does not know the number of its inhabitants and in which the only things that are calculated are taxes, fines, duties, tolls and customs fees."

Such publicity, however, would only influence readers, who were in a minority at that time. New means had to be found to create a reliable system for conducting the census. In 1892, the government formed a committee "commissioned with the task of reviewing and selecting the best methods to conduct a population census in Egypt." Proposals came from all directions and *Al-Ahram*, too, had a contribution to make to the ensuing debate.

The newspaper opposed the suggestion that the census be conducted over a long term. "This will lead to considerable distortion and inaccuracy, due to the migration of populations and services as well as births and deaths which will occur during the period in which the census is conducted." Instead, it proposed that every city or village be divided into several sectors and that "three or four government representatives be appointed to implement the instructions of the authorities in charge of the process." It further proposed a practical method for gathering statistics. "A form, specifying the information required, should be distributed to every house, hotel and public and private establishment, the owners of which would be responsible to provide, on a specific date, the names and nationality of all individuals residing beneath their roof on that very night, as well as other information that may be required such as whether they are members of the household or visitors. Then, the representatives would pass around the houses within their zones, collect the forms and submit them to the census committee."

Also, aware of the problem of illiteracy, the writer suggests that, in this event, "the representative should undertake the task of filling in the form on behalf of the household or commercial establishment

owner." On 15 February 1892, Egypt's first census committee met in the premises of the Ministry of Interior to review the many proposals put forward by the newspapers and diverse individuals. The committee favoured *Al-Ahram's* suggestions, a fact that was blazoned in the following day's edition, although it was noted that the committee "decided to add some conditions that would entice the people to answer the questions truthfully in this beneficial endeavour."

With the creation of the census department in the Ministry of Finance, the endeavour was transformed into institutionalised action. The new department was allocated its own employees and inspectors to cover all of the provinces, in total employing a staff of no less than 150. Apparently, this process took a considerable period of time — at least three years according to *Al-Ahram* — although the committee was not entirely idle during this period.

One of its tasks was to conduct trial censuses in certain selected towns and villages in Giza and Qalyubia.

By 1898 everything was in place to perform the major operation. Instructions were passed down from the provincial to the district superintendents in which they were enjoined to "observe the procedures and regulations that must be followed which are to conduct a census so as to record the number of citizens and foreigners of all nationalities, religious affiliations and sexes, to supervise these activity and to assist in its successful completion."

On 2 June, 1897, officers representing the new census department set off in all directions to gather the data. *Al-Ahram* noted, in the process, one flaw. Evidently, some officers were not provided clear instructions, or were not following their instructions to the letter. Instead of asking household owners, many simply asked the doormen, "who might only know one or two of the members of the household." The results would be based on a calculation of averages of contradictory figures, which, according to the newspaper, would not be sufficiently accurate.

On 5 June, the first results began to appear. The newspaper was most struck by "the censuses in the major cities which indicate a great increase in the population, which experts attribute to the spread of sanitation and health facilities and to obligatory education."

Ten days later, *Al-Ahram's* correspondent in the capital dispatched the following telegram to the newspaper's headquarters in Alexandria: "Egypt has a total of 9,654,323 inhabitants, 1,017,741 in the provinces, 4,641,197 in the Delta and 3,995,385 in Upper Egypt." In addition to breaking down the number of inhabitants within each individual province, the telegram also noted that there were 109,725 foreigners in Egypt at the time.

Al-Ahram was most impressed. "The population of Egypt has increased four fold in a hundred years. In thirty more years it will double and within half a century Egypt, from the shores of the Mediterranean to Wadi Halfa will have a populous nation, no less in number than any European nation." Not only did the figures compound over the next century at a far faster rate than predicted, but the prediction was expressed with an optimism that could not have foretold the nightmare the population explosion would cause the Egyptian government.

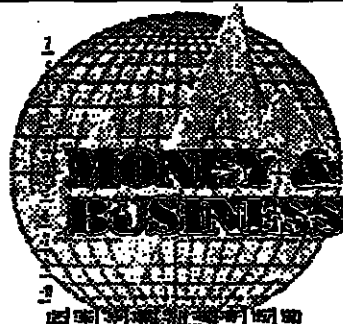
The author is a professor of history and head of *Al-Ahram* History Studies Centre.



Lecture on container transport

MOHAMED Shafiq Mirah, press attaché and professor at the Arab Academy for Science, Technology and Sea Transport gave a lecture under the title: "The International System of Container Transport and its Effects on Egyptian Beaches and Coasts". This was given at a conference organised by the Egyptian Naval Society, headed by Gen. Ahmed Abdel-Munsef Mohamed, and held in the main halls of the Miami Academy in Alexandria.

MONEY & BUSINESS



Auditor's association to join international federation

HAZEM Hassan, chairman of the Egyptian Auditor's Association, stated that the association was chosen to represent Egypt in the Auditors International Federation. He added that the association is currently taking part in enacting a new law that allows institutions with scientific potentials to provide consultation services. Providing accurate and correct data is crucially important in the capital market. This is what these institutions will try to achieve.

Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt

Financial statement
Until Feb. 19, 1996

Results L.E.	Until Feb. 19 1996	Until March 1 1995	Growth rate %
- Volume of transactions	10000	8988	11.3%
- Financial position	6469	6228	3.9%
- Deposits	4988	4791	4.1%
- Investment balance	5743	5530	3.9%
- Revenues	505	450	12.2%
- Net profits	213	200	6.5%

Distributed profits for depositors during the past nine months totalled L.E. 204.5 million in comparison with L.E. 174.8 million at the same period in the previous year

The number of companies founded by the bank or in which the bank holds shares until Feb.19/1996 reached 37 companies operating in all fields. The total capital of these amounts to L.E. 1074 million of which Faisal bank owns L.E. 191 million. Five companies operate in agriculture, eight in industry, five in medicine, three in domestic trade, two in housing, seven in banking

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NBE supporting private sector projects

GUIDED by its long standing experience of 98 years, National Bank of Egypt (NBE) is considered to be one of the main pillars of the national economy. This is manifested in its pioneering role in the Egyptian banking system, in addition to its sound presence in the Arab world and internationally.

NBE has adopted a comprehensive philosophy tilted towards giving an impetus to domestic economic development via investment and financing policies

that square with the emerging economic variables. These policies aim at boosting all economic sectors, either via direct finance or equity participation in vital economic projects. NBE's total loans provided up to the end of February 1996 recorded LE24.7bn, of which LE11.5bn (47 per cent of total loans) was allocated for the private and housing sectors.

Simultaneously, NBE has sought to promote private investments through direct participation

in newly established projects, in addition to offering a portion of the projects' capital to public subscription in the development process. NBE's participation covers 105 projects with a total sum of LE1.3bn, representing 12 per cent of their capitals.

In the light of the new trend geared towards penetrating the field of universal banking, NBE has embarked on establishing non-traditional companies providing non-banking activities. Accordingly, NBE renders funding

activities to infrastructure projects, establishment of private industrial city, tourist and real estate development, technology and communication projects in addition to leasing operations which provide the finance deemed necessary at a convenient cost.

NBE has also initiated a specialised body to prepare and evaluate projects' economic feasibility studies, using state-of-the-art scientific techniques with a view to enhancing its investment and credit decisions.

Conference on insurance for terrorist damage

IN CONCORDANCE with its policy to provide the best form of insurance coverage to the Egyptian market, in addition to maintaining its outstanding role within the insurance sector, the Egyptian Re-Insurance Company held a conference at its headquarters, on the topic: "Recent Coverage Provided by the Egyptian Fund Against War and Terrorism Damage". Nabil Hajjar, marketing manager of the fund, attended the conference at the invitation of Mohamed El-Tir, chairman of the board of the company and head of the International Union of Insurance and Re-Insurance Companies in Developing Countries. Also attending were a number of experts from Egyptian insurance companies. It is worth mentioning that an Arab fund to cover war damages was founded in 1980 in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War, which allowed for Arab cooperation in the insurance market.

Al-Ahram offers e-mail services

WE CURRENTLY live in the information age, where telecommunications and technology are changing the way we look at our world and ourselves.

Al-Ahram — the largest and oldest press organisation in the Middle East — has established an Arabic e-mail network, using *Al-Ahram's* resources and the most modern means to offer communication services via the Internet in Arabic. The network operates within the framework of *Al-Ahram* Press Organisation, which offers the following services:

For ministries, organisations and banks, they provide the use of e-mail, a fast and private way to send messages, 24 hours a day, from the organisation's centre to its branches domestically and abroad.

Additional services offered to businessmen include specialised daily bulletins: late morning and evening news; economy (banking, money, business, investment, tourism); culture; daily and weekly political coverage and analysis; activities of Arabs residing abroad; etc. The Information Centre extends

all of its services to academics and researchers.

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18 new companies established

THE COMPANIES Committee of the Ministry of Economy and International Cooperation headed by Ahmed Fouad Ata, agreed to the establishment of 18 new companies last week, 9 of which are shareholding companies having authorised capitals of LE262mn and paid capitals of LE24.26mn. Nine companies are limited liability.

Among these companies, 8 are involved in commercial activities, 3 in industry and tourism, while the rest are involved in contracting and services. Among these companies, 12 are based in Cairo, 4 in Giza, and 1 each in Alexandria and Hurghada.

On deadly ground

Stopping far short of an apology for the slaughter of 98 Lebanese refugees in a UN camp in Qana, Peres rationalised the massacre by arguing that "...these things happen in war". This is a truly cavalier attitude to embrace at a time when peace has been the word thrown about as freely as the lives of the Lebanese are being terminated by Israeli occupation forces in south Lebanon.

In fact, aside from this quotable quote, Peres has given no clues about anything else. There has been no indication of when Israel plans to stop the air raids and artillery bombardments. There are also no indications as to what shape or pace the peace process will take in light of recent developments.

The only thing that is clear, however, is the duplicitous attitude with which Israel deals with its Arab neighbours. Responding to the smallest unsubstantiated rumour that countries like Libya are developing chemical weapons, Israel launches, or calls for, a "pre-emptive" strike. And yet, similar criticism of its nuclear programme is entirely taboo. Consequently, military offensives undertaken by Israeli forces in sovereign nations are blessed under the guise of national security interests. But, is this concept so broad as to allow Israel to occupy the territory of a sovereign nation, slaughter its citizens and then in the same breath call upon a third party to show its commitment to peace?

In Peres' mind, the answer is apparently, yes. It is far more convenient to lay down the conditions for peace with Syria, manipulate and undermine the integrity of the Palestinian self-rule areas and launch a full scale attack on Lebanon than to make the effort to understand that true peace is built on trust and compromise, not graves. As an occupying power, Israel should not be surprised by Hezbollah's response any more than it should expect Assad to accede to the demands made by Peres or that the Arabs would not unite in protest.

The argument put forth by Peres that "our men were in a legitimate situation of self-defence," is unfounded. The need for defence would not have arisen had Israel not opted to enter south Lebanon instead of negotiations with Syria.

Whereas Israel can roll its tanks across borders, its airforce can bomb civilians at will, its propagandists can fill the Western media with their lies about self-defence and the war against terrorism, the Arabs for their part can only bleat out squeals of anger. There are groups here and there (like Hezbollah) that can offer Israel resistance with outmoded Katyushas, but they are part of no alliance or plan that is larger than them. Lebanon has now been bombed mercilessly for almost two weeks, yet no Arab capital has brought forth any official response except silence or polite diplomatic mumbling.

The problem is Arab powerlessness. This bears repeating: the problem is Arab powerlessness. This is something for which neither the United States — which has behaved as an extension of the Israeli government, and the lamentable Warren Christopher as its local office boy — nor France, nor the European Union has a solution. It is an Arab problem, and it concerns every individual who calls him/herself an Arab. We are all part of this general incapacity to do much except look on, wringing our hands, crying, or going on strike.

The most recent solution to our problems has been the so-called peace process, which any mentally competent observer of Israel could have figured out as an extension of its long standing policy to dominate the Arabs militarily and economically. For Israel, Arabs are racially inferior people who must be beaten or punished until they obey. When they don't, as in the Hezbollah instance, the Israelis are momentarily

stopped, though their arrogance continues. Then came the sudden illumination on the part of great minds like Mahmoud Abbas and Yasser Arafat that Shimon Peres and Yitzhak Rabin had undergone a change. They had become visionary men of peace. So, leading an exhausted and disillusioned Palestinian people, Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen leapt into Israel's lap.

All you have to do to know what then happened is to visit the Occupied Territories, which I have just done. Then you can see that the peace process means Israeli occupation with Palestinian partners. The Palestinian Authority now has 12,000 Palestinian prisoners, thus proving that a Palestinian enforcer of Israeli policies can be as clever as an Israeli at catching Palestinian "terrorists" and "fundamentalists". The only trouble is that the military occupation continues, the Territories are closed, Area A is only 1 per cent of the West Bank, there is 70 per cent unemployment, Palestinian lands are expropriated every day, houses are demolished, people go hungry and they are tortured, but Mr Arafat goes to meet Peres while the Israeli army is bombing Lebanon and killing civilians. The two great peacekeepers and Nobel prize winners emerge from their meetings with smiles on their faces. The peace process moves forward, and allows Peres to invade Lebanon, thus placing his desire to be re-elected above the lives of half a million Lebanese refugees and several hundred fatalities.

Such powerlessness borders on the comic. Of the ten countries who lead the world in arms purchases seven are Arab. Every Arab citizen

has seen the armies and the police forces everywhere on streets and street corners. None of these, no airforce or navy or army is used to deter Israel, except Syria's, although it too will not fight back in Lebanon where it has 30,000 troops.

The real question is powerlessness. As V.S. Naipaul, the Trinidadian-British writer, has his main character say in his first novel, *The Mimic Men*:

"We [in the Third World] lack order. Above all, we lack power. We do not understand that we lack power. We mistake words and the acclamation of words for power; as soon as our bluff is called we are lost."

It is certainly true that alone of the Arab states Syria has stuck to its principles about complete withdrawal, but this does not mitigate the fact that like all other Arab states Syria has no real civil society, or democracy, or social dynamism; its policies in Lebanon do not provoke admiration or participation on the part of most Lebanese, who feel themselves — rightly so — powerless in Syria's orbit. As a society we are left with slogans and, as Naipaul's character says, words. And these continue to camouflage the reality from us, which is our own self-inflicted powerlessness. We must all of us ask why it is that for the past five decades we have watched Israel violate our sovereignty, massacre our civilians, humiliate our soldiers and generals, colonise our land, even as we make speeches and vow vengeance. Empty words in the air.

Our last gamble — that Israel wants peace and

is willing to be generous — has proved to be extremely flawed. Israel, like the United States, wants to preserve its interests intact. No matter how many times Abu Ammar and Abu Mazen repeat the words "peace process", the facts are that their people lose more land (and sovereignty) every day, and Jerusalem is more lost to the Palestinians every day. When a "crisis" occurs, all the Arab peacekeepers act surprised, as if they had no idea that Israel would behave this way, although of course it has always behaved this way, and will continue to do so, because it has power and we do not. Power, after all, is not just military strength. It is the social power that comes from democracy, the cultural power that comes from freedom of expression and research, the personal power that entitles every Arab citizen to feel that he or she is in fact a citizen, and not just a sheep in some great shepherd's flock.

I often think that one reason for our powerlessness is that we feel self-hatred. Otherwise it is impossible to explain how over 200 million people with human and natural resources of a high order can continuously hurt themselves, continuously prevent themselves from accumulating the kind of power that brings self-respect and seriousness of purpose? I have no other explanation for our situation, which cannot be extended or explained away by appeals to the ravages of imperialism, or to corrupt regimes, or any of the other fables of self-exculpation.

The problem is Arab powerlessness.

Arab powerlessness

The question is not only that Israel has lived outside the norms of international behaviour in war or in peace since it was established, but that today the Arabs are totally powerless, writes **Edward Said**

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Heikal & the coming debate

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses one particular aspect of Mohamed Heikal's last book, namely, the place it is likely to occupy in the future ideological debate

For all that it is apparently focused on the past, Mohamed Hassanein Heikal's latest book, *Secret Channels — the inside story of Arab-Israeli peace negotiations* has an important bearing on the future in so far as it presages debates that are expected to acquire cardinal importance in the coming period. This is particularly true of the first of the three-volume Arabic-language version of the book to be published, which deals with the roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948.

The book's futuristic dimension lies in that the historical angle from which it chooses to address the issue of Arab-Israeli relations casts light on the shape which the ideological conflict between the two sides is likely to assume for a long time to come, despite the plethora of peace agreements, even if they eventually come to include all the parties to the dispute. The resumption of the peace process should not be dismissed as a real possibility despite the Lebanese crisis; indeed, the acute nature of the crisis could well spur international parties to work seriously for its re-activation.

As I have often repeated, the peace process has so far succeeded only in freezing a specific contradiction, that between the Arab regimes and Israel, which, though possibly the main contradiction in the region, is far from being the only one. Other contradictions, which remain active and volatile, have not been eliminated but merely displaced into Israeli society on the one side and into the Arab world on the other, where they operate between the various Arab states and inside each Arab state.

The most dramatic proof of the displacement of contradictions inside Israel was the assassination of its former prime minister at the hands of a fellow Jew, in retaliation for what he termed the Israeli government's capitulation to Arab demands at the expense of the security and integrity of the Jewish state. Of course, political assassination is not the most prevalent weapon in inter-Israeli strife. The main conflict between Labour and Likud is being played out through the ballot boxes and in the Knesset, not least because keeping its domestic political game within a democratic framework remains Israel's best guar-

antee of survival in a hostile environment. Because they do not feel threatened in the same way, the Arab parties are less concerned when it comes to allowing their differences to erupt outside the democratic framework. In that sense, the adverse effects of the displacement of contradictions are more manifest in the Arab world.

What applies to the Arab world in general applies more particularly to the Palestinian theatre, the essence of the conflict, which is today threatened with civil war. In that context, not to mention what is happening in Lebanon, ideological struggle is unlikely to disappear in any foreseeable future. On the contrary, the recurrent crises accompanying — and hindering — the peace process promise to keep the struggle alive for a long time to come. Heikal's book puts forward many of the arguments that the protagonists are expected to use in the ongoing debate.

It also presents eloquent proof of the Jewish problem's deep and extensive links with the mainstream of modern history, most notably a previously unpublished document in which Napoleon called on the Jews of the diaspora to return to the Holy Land and reclaim their place among the nations of the world: "O Israelites, come to your holy places", his proclamation beckoned. When we add to this the efforts of British foreign secretary, Viscount Palmerston, in the 1840s, to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine as a means of creating a barrier between Egypt and Syria and clipping the wings of Mohamed Ali after his defeat at Navarin, it becomes clear that Israel's implantation in the heart of the Arab world was not just a Zionist project and that the persecution to which the Jews were exposed in Europe not the only reason for its establishment.

By demonstrating that the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland in

Palestine precedes the Zionist project, which Theodor Herzl only put forward after the Dreyfuss affair at the end of the nineteenth century, Heikal highlights that Israel's existence is linked to the geopolitical interests of the great powers, past, present and future.

It is ironic that, in this regard, Hitler and his enemies saw eye to eye, in the sense that both wanted to end the Jewish presence in Europe, Hitler through physical extermination, the other Western powers by displacing the bulk of Europe's Jewish population to the East, more precisely, the Middle East. This trilateral game, as it were, reveals an ambivalent Jewish-European relationship which Hitler's defeat has not resolved.

In preparation for the coming ideological conflict, Israel is using the centenary of Herzl's book, *The Jewish State*, to update Zionism in line with the requirements of the post-peace situation. At the same time, it is seeking to assert its historical links to the region by celebrating the millennium of the "founding" of Jerusalem by David and Solomon, conveniently forgetting that the city existed some 2,000 years before the advent of Judaism.

In chapter 5 of his book, Heikal talks of the Jewish community in Egypt before the creation of Israel, particularly in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when many Egyptian Jews were actively involved in preparations for the establishment of the Jewish state. This chapter also deals with the role of Jews in the Egyptian communist movement, rightly pointing out that all the main communist organisations were founded by Jews. As an eyewitness recruited into one of these organisations, I would like to elaborate this point further by drawing on my personal experience.

One cannot dismiss as a coincidence the zeal with which middle and upper

class Jews set out to create communist organisations, an endeavour that reached its climax in 1942, the year the Soviet Union enjoyed its finest hour at the battle of Stalingrad, and Rommel was in Alamein preparing to invade Egypt and to move on from there to Palestine. While I am not an advocate of the conspiracy theory of history, there is evidence to suggest that some Jews believed that by espousing communism, an ideology which by definition opposes racism, they would become part of a wider constituency capable of providing them with protection against the threat of Nazi anti-Semitism. This is a more plausible explanation for the strong Jewish involvement in the Egyptian communist movement than to assume it was prompted by concern with the lot of the Egyptian working class. It is an explanation that is further borne out by the fact that the scions of upper class Egyptians were recruited into the movement, which would not have been the case if the movement had emanated normally from the working class struggle.

Heikal notes that the use of volunteers to entertain Allied troops in Egypt during the war was often a cover for Zionist activities in Egypt. Many who experienced Egyptian communism in the '40s can say that entertainment figured prominently in the activities of the Jewish-led communist organisations at the time. With the outbreak of the Palestine war in 1948, the identity crisis of these organisations came to a head, as the interests of their Jewish leaders in protecting themselves against the threat of Nazism collided with those of the Egyptian members, who saw Israel, whose raison d'être was the protection of the Jews wherever they were, as their main enemy.

This dilemma tore the Egyptian communist movement apart in 1948. As a way out of the crisis, the Jewish leadership proposed a tacit compromise whereby they would camouflage themselves not to embrace Zionism in exchange for the Egyptians not embracing pan-Arabism. The possibility of an updated version of this compromise being proposed by the architects of the post-peace model of Zionism cannot be discounted. It is a possibility Heikal understandably views with a great deal of trepidation.

Writing in a vacuum

By Naguib Mahfouz



I am fortunate that translations of my work are handled by AUC Press. That, at least, is one load off my shoulders. Yet my position vis-à-vis translations is far from common.

Anyone who chooses writing as a profession, particularly in the developing world, faces many problems. There is the fact that high levels of illiteracy restrict the potential audience. But there are also other structural difficulties.

In the West writers are represented by agents who handle everything for them, from negotiating contracts to public relations. The writer is thus free to spend most of his time writing, since everything else is taken care of. But in Egypt, for example, writers find themselves dangling in mid-air. In the past they would have been published by the state. Bureaucrats in the official publishing houses would have taken care of foreign rights issues and so forth. But these state apparatuses have disappeared and the agents have yet to emerge.

We are in a transitional stage, during which it would be useful if literary institutions could take over part of the role once filled by the state. The Writers' Union, for example, gives some symbolic assistance to any writer wishing to publish his work, but it, or any other literary society, could also help in finding publishers for new works.

Egypt possesses young literary talent a plenty. If it is not encouraged it will be scattered and forgotten, which would be a great loss.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salim.

The Press This Week

By Hassan Fouad

THE NATIONAL and party press this week were unanimous in expressing outrage at the Israeli military assault against Lebanon. At the beginning of the week, Makram Mohamed Ahmed, editor-in-chief of the weekly magazine, *Al-Mussawwar*, wrote a three-page article entitled, "What is left of Middle East peace?" in which he said: "It was the Israelis who violated an agreement stipulating that Hezbollah would not strike at settlements, provided that Israel did not attack civilians in south Lebanon. This fact has been suppressed by a powerful media drive."

peace, and whose leaders have failed to sway from such old and fallacious notions.

"The Israelis have tried invading Lebanon. They entered Beirut and over many years attempted to silence the Lebanese resistance in the South. They have shelled houses and villages and devastated the daily life of the people. But Israel has had no success. On the contrary, Hezbollah's influence has increased in Lebanon to the detriment of the more moder-

ate Shi'ite forces."

In October magazine, editor-in-chief Ragab El-Banna wrote a three-page article entitled, "Who will now believe Israel?" in which he said: "Who among the Arabs can now believe or trust Israel? Israel today has two faces. One is calm and innocent, proclaiming the message of peace to the world. The other is grim and horrible, cruel and threatening."

Heikal's book puts forward many of the arguments that the protagonists are expected to use in the ongoing debate. It also presents eloquent proof of the Jewish problem's deep and extensive links with the mainstream of modern history, most notably a previously unpublished document in which Napoleon called on the Jews of the diaspora to return to the Holy Land and reclaim their place among the nations of the world: "O Israelites, come to your holy places", his proclamation beckoned. When we add to this the efforts of British foreign secretary, Viscount Palmerston, in the 1840s, to create a Jewish homeland in Palestine as a means of creating a barrier between Egypt and Syria and clipping the wings of Mohamed Ali after his defeat at Navarin, it becomes clear that Israel's implantation in the heart of the Arab world was not just a Zionist project and that the persecution to which the Jews were exposed in Europe not the only reason for its establishment.

By demonstrating that the idea of establishing a Jewish homeland in Palestine precedes the Zionist project, which Theodor Herzl only put forward after the Dreyfuss affair at the end of the nineteenth century, Heikal highlights that Israel's existence is linked to the geopolitical interests of the great powers, past, present and future. It is ironic that, in this regard, Hitler and his enemies saw eye to eye, in the sense that both wanted to end the Jewish presence in Europe, Hitler through physical extermination, the other Western powers by displacing the bulk of Europe's Jewish population to the East, more precisely, the Middle East. This trilateral game, as it were, reveals an ambivalent Jewish-European relationship which Hitler's defeat has not resolved.

In preparation for the coming ideological conflict, Israel is using the centenary of Herzl's book, *The Jewish State*, to update Zionism in line with the requirements of the post-peace situation. At the same time, it is seeking to assert its historical links to the region by celebrating the millennium of the "founding" of Jerusalem by David and Solomon, conveniently forgetting that the city existed some 2,000 years before the advent of Judaism.

In chapter 5 of his book, Heikal talks of the Jewish community in Egypt before the creation of Israel, particularly in the immediate aftermath of World War II, when many Egyptian Jews were actively involved in preparations for the establishment of the Jewish state. This chapter also deals with the role of Jews in the Egyptian communist movement, rightly pointing out that all the main communist organisations were founded by Jews. As an eyewitness recruited into one of these organisations, I would like to elaborate this point further by drawing on my personal experience.

One cannot dismiss as a coincidence the zeal with which middle and upper

class Jews set out to create communist organisations, an endeavour that reached its climax in 1942, the year the Soviet Union enjoyed its finest hour at the battle of Stalingrad, and Rommel was in Alamein preparing to invade Egypt and to move on from there to Palestine. While I am not an advocate of the conspiracy theory of history, there is evidence to suggest that some Jews believed that by espousing communism, an ideology which by definition opposes racism, they would become part of a wider constituency capable of providing them with protection against the threat of Nazi anti-Semitism. This is a more plausible explanation for the strong Jewish involvement in the Egyptian communist movement than to assume it was prompted by concern with the lot of the Egyptian working class. It is an explanation that is further borne out by the fact that the scions of upper class Egyptians were recruited into the movement, which would not have been the case if the movement had emanated normally from the working class struggle.

Heikal notes that the use of volunteers to entertain Allied troops in Egypt during the war was often a cover for Zionist activities in Egypt. Many who experienced Egyptian communism in the '40s can say that entertainment figured prominently in the activities of the Jewish-led communist organisations at the time. With the outbreak of the Palestine war in 1948, the identity crisis of these organisations came to a head, as the interests of their Jewish leaders in protecting themselves against the threat of Nazism collided with those of the Egyptian members, who saw Israel, whose raison d'être was the protection of the Jews wherever they were, as their main enemy.

This dilemma tore the Egyptian communist movement apart in 1948. As a way out of the crisis, the Jewish leadership proposed a tacit compromise whereby they would camouflage themselves not to embrace Zionism in exchange for the Egyptians not embracing pan-Arabism. The possibility of an updated version of this compromise being proposed by the architects of the post-peace model of Zionism cannot be discounted. It is a possibility Heikal understandably views with a great deal of trepidation.

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Faces of Israel

Israeli aggression in South Lebanon. As for the opposition papers, *Al-Wafd* editor-in-chief Gamal Badawi wrote an article in the weekly edition entitled, "Do not join hands with the butcher", in which he said: "The massacre which occurred yesterday is not a smear against the Israelis but against the Arab rulers who signed the surrender documents and who have misled us with a false peace and presented us as an offering to the US dragon."

"What is the use of all the aircraft, missiles and gunships in Arab arsenals? Were they bought for use in parades and festivals or were they bought to defend the Arab countries against aggression from their worse aggression than that which is taking place in Lebanon today?"

"Say that you will not shake the blood-stained hands of the butcher, nor receive him in our country; we will not present him with ceremonial swords; we will not sit at the same table with a war criminal who has ignored the rules of war and trampled underfoot all humane considerations. Say it and do not be afraid."

Israeli alliance obligates the US to give Israel the necessary support, including the use of the veto, even if Israel was the aggressor or the perpetrator of massacres."

Mohamed El-Ezabi, another columnist in *Al-Gomhuriya*, wrote in his daily column on page two that the Israeli embassy reception, on the occasion of the anniversary of the creation of Israel, should be boycotted as a protest against Is-

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Close up

Salama A. Salama

To paper the cracks

Everybody expected that the US Secretary of State Warren Christopher's visit to Lebanon would result in a cessation of hostilities as part of a larger package to resolve the on-going crisis the details of which would be released later. If this was not going to be the case, what on earth is the point of the standing arrangement between Israel and the US? And why has Peres upheld the American plan to the exclusion of all other international initiatives?

Jointly the US and Israel have cooperated to block a Security Council resolution condemning the Israeli aggression, and to preclude all other international efforts aimed at halting the savage Israeli assault against Lebanon as a first step towards a political settlement, such as those made by France, the EU and the Russian Federation. Meanwhile, Israel intensifies its bombing, widens the scale of its military operation, kills civilians, destroys the infrastructure of Lebanon, decimating its roads, hospitals and civil installations, in accordance with a pre-set plan to sever southern Lebanon from the north of the country. Only one conclusion could be drawn from all this, which is that Israel has received full American backing for its massive military operation, from start to finish. Arabs would do well to ponder the implications of such a conclusion.

Logically the US should have called for an immediate cessation of Israel's military operations, if only to protect civilian lives pending the result of Warren Christopher's shuttle diplomacy. This is precisely what the French foreign minister demanded when he called for diplomatic contacts between Israel, Syria, Hezbollah, the Lebanese authorities, and Iranian representatives. Peres refused these demands, preferring to continue his military operation in order to pressure Damascus into providing written guarantees concerning Hezbollah.

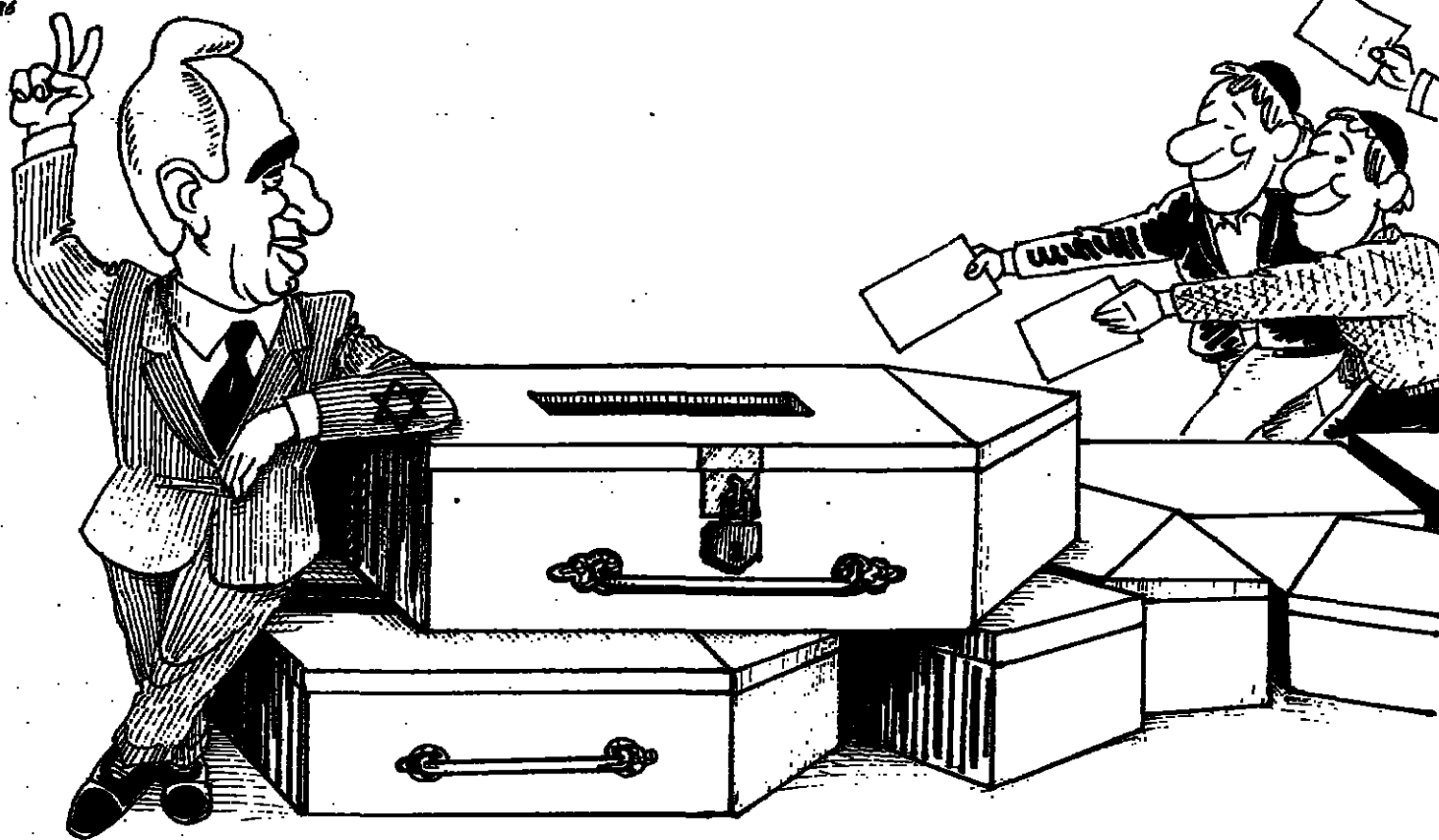
Israel, apparently, seeks to hold Syria responsible for the actions of Hezbollah. Which, of course, begs a question. Who can act as a guarantor for Israeli actions? The question gains in urgency when we realise that Hezbollah was in fact reacting to a series of Israeli provocations. And how can Syria be expected to accept the responsibilities implied by furnishing Israel with written guarantees if these are not linked to other issues that have so far proved an insurmountable hurdle in the way of peace between Israel, Syria and Lebanon?

These were problems addressed by the French initiative that was rejected by Israel. The manner of this rejection discredited the scarcely veiled clash between France and the European Union on the one hand and America on the other. The result of these differences has been the visits to Lebanon of a number of foreign ministers, representatives of the great powers, each singing a different dirge to accompany the corpses of the dozens of victims of Israeli shelling.

In the midst of all this turmoil, no one thought to ask the Arabs about their position, which perhaps was to be expected. As for France and the rest of the EU states, they have had to pay the price of their blind support for the US's biased position in the Security Council in the form of American and Israeli disregard and even disdain for their political initiatives.

Ultimately, the success of American efforts will be measured by their ability to overcome the obstacles that have so far blocked Syrian-Israeli negotiations, and by the recognition of Lebanese sovereignty over the whole of its territory. Without accomplishing these, no agreement can be anything other than a papering over of cracks in an illusory peace.

Gomaa. 4-96



Israel's impossible peace

Israel's brutalities in Lebanon have taught the Arabs a lesson once and for all, writes Gamil Mattar: for all the lip-service and hand-shaking, nothing has changed in the Middle East

Israeli massacres of civilians in South Lebanon and Beirut during the past two weeks provide a living embodiment of the concept of terrorism. They are also a renewed Israeli attempt to affirm that the peace for which the Sharm El-Sheikh summit called in the first part of its communiqué is not made or kept in international conferences, but is imposed by Israel. Israeli peace, lest we forget, is a regional arrangement whereby the military and political leaders of the region — those directly bordering Israel as well as those further away — accept that the principal role of their armed forces is the protection of Israel from without. This definition of Israeli peace is not a deduction or a personal interpretation of events: it is one which Israel's military leaders have asserted over and over again. Most recently, it was affirmed by Israeli Foreign Minister Ehud Barak, who warned that Israel will continue to launch raids against Lebanon until the Lebanese army itself takes upon itself the task of protecting Israel's northern borders.

Events have proven right those who warned that certain pernicious intentions had penetrated the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, and that the summit could be misused to disastrous effect. A state of extreme pessimism pervades many Arab capitals. Along with other Arab analysts, I have followed with interest the deep frustration that a number of Arab officials have been expressing as a reaction to the intensity of American pressure and to Washington's total disregard for Arab sensitivity, not to speak of Arab rights.

In discussions with Arab officials and analysts, I have felt a tone of disappointment in Washington beneath which one could detect a sense of intense anger, strongly controlled lest it boil to the surface. I have heard reports of the regret expressed by officials of certain Arab states who had imagined pre-emptively that a bright future of Arab-Israeli relations was already upon us. A few days ago I met with a number of Arab thinkers and writers, known for their moderation and realism, in an Arab capital. I was astounded by their reaction to the savage Israeli bombing of Beirut and South Lebanon, which included the forcible expulsion of nearly a half a million Arabs from their homes and the willful murder of innocent children.

Israel's complete disregard for the effects of its terrorism on the peace process, and on the sentiments of the Arab peoples, who have been proclaimed Israel's peace partners, had jolted these moderate intellectuals to fierce

anger against Israel, the US and even Arab governments. One can only conclude, therefore, that Israel and the US have come to the certain conclusion that there is no hope that the Arab peoples will submit and accept peaceful co-existence with Israeli terrorism and Israeli humiliation. So Israel, working with the US, is now resolved to use savage coercion against Arab governments to force them to submit to unequal peace treaties, which pit them against their own peoples.

The motives behind Israel's "Grapes of Wrath" operation in Lebanon have been the subject of various interpretations. Some, including most Arab foreign ministries, have suggested that it is part of the Israeli Labour Party's electoral campaign. Shimon Peres, it is said, is adopting a hawkish posture to win votes. But this analysis, it must be pointed out, must perforce lead us to a very grave conclusion regarding the Israeli electorate — that it is extremist, intransigent and has no interest in a genuine peace.

It has also been suggested that the Israeli bombing of Lebanon and the destruction of its budding infrastructure, has two inter-related aims. The first, it is said, is a response to Jacques Chirac's reassuring statements directed to the people of Lebanon, in which he went so far as to predict that Lebanon will resume its pre-civil war status as the financial centre of the Middle East.

As for the second objective, it was to disrupt progress on the reconstruction of Beirut's new commercial and financial centre. Work on this project began as soon as most of the essential infrastructure was restored to full capacity, capable of absorbing the renewed influx of investment from the Gulf and Lebanon abroad. In other words, Israel wanted to bring home the message that France's true weight in the Middle East does not permit Chirac to make predictions without first consulting Israel and the US. Israel is also warning the Lebanese against any attempts to go ahead with plans for reconstruction without becoming involved in the new Middle East order's conferences and projects — which will determine for Lebanon, as for others in the region, the role it is to play.

Other analysts contend that Israel — and others — have been feeling recently that the Arabs, at both official and unofficial levels, have begun to exert pressure in an attempt to have a greater say in the peace process and the course it follows. To Israel, this means that some Arab countries, Egypt foremost among them, are aiming for a peace that is more genuine and comprehensive. Israel is

also becoming aware of the fact that the major Arab parties have begun to reassess the returns of an Israeli-style peace in terms of their economic and security interests and internal stability. Israel's actions in Lebanon, therefore, were geared to send the Arabs the following message: "We regret to inform you that, if you were expecting a better peace or more favourable conditions, this will not be possible; our formula and our conditions are the only ones on offer."

One intended recipient was to be the Egyptian government, which, in addition to trying to improve the conditions of the peace settlement, has consistently sought to lift hopes in the region by seizing every possible opportunity to advocate the declaration of the Middle East as a nuclear-free zone and to promote Arab integration as a foundation for broader economic relations in the region.

The slaughter Israeli forces are carrying out in Lebanon was propelled by another motive relating to an issue of considerable significance. Arab political analysts perceive that we are still feeling only the first tremors of Rabin's assassination and its consequences. They hold that, within Israel and its political, military and security apparatuses, there are strong pressure groups that believe that the peace process, the relinquishment of Gaza and some Palestinian cities, and the establishment of a Palestinian state threaten not only the security, but the survival of the Zionist state. These groups fear that the "fortress state" dependent since its inception on mobilising maximum antagonism towards the Arabs, risks losing its very raison d'être because anti-Arab hostility in Israel is no longer at its peak. Hence the assassination of Rabin; and hence, since then, the massive campaign of violence directed against the symbols of Palestinian resistance, the deliberate humiliation of the Palestinian National Authority, the blockade against the Palestinian people and, now, the slaughter of the Lebanese. The purpose of all these acts, according to the analysts, is to shake the Israeli people from their complacency, to rekindle Israeli racism against the Arabs, and to stir Arab hatred against Israel.

Analysts have suggested other reasons for which Israel has resorted to this massive level of brutality against Lebanese and Palestinian civilians. Some say that Israel wanted to weaken the Lebanese-Syrian bond so that both parties come to the negotiating table at a disadvantage. The bombing weakened Hariri's government, disrupted its reconstruction programme and compounded the al-

Soapbox

The right to resist

The Israeli aggression against Lebanon continues for a second week. Each new assault on Lebanon is carried out under a different umbrella. The fact remains, however, that Lebanon has become the peace process's sacrificial lamb.

Lebanon is being made to pay the price of domestic Israeli electoral considerations. Israel's pretext in launching its massive military campaign against Lebanon, by land, sea and air forces, as retaliation against the operations of the Lebanese resistance, is absurd. Resistance operations are a result of the Israeli occupation, not its cause, and such resistance is legitimate in accordance with international law. To disarm the resistance forces before Israel's unconditional withdrawal from Lebanese territories down to its international borders is to consolidate the Israeli occupation and provide it with the stamp of legitimacy.

Israel's savage military operations are nothing short of a full-scale war against the Lebanese state as a whole. The destruction of Lebanon's basic infrastructure, such as water and electrical power stations far from the battle front, targets Lebanon as a state and aims at sabotaging its economic foundations, obstructing its reconstruction efforts and threatening its march towards unity and public peace.

In Qana and Nabatiya the true nature of the Grapes of Wrath operation was revealed, as Israeli terror left hundreds of dead and wounded in its wake, most of them women, children and elderly people. Behind all this lies Israel's overall objective: to impose its "Middle Eastern" project, which in Israel's book is equal to its uncontested regional hegemony.

The latest Israeli aggression has exploded the whole peace process. Arab outrage may well strike back against the perpetrators of Grapes of Wrath, and overthrow the Israeli peace based on war and savagery.

This week's soapbox speaker is the ambassador of Lebanon in Cairo.



Hisham Dimashkieh

To The Editor

Monumental harm

Sir: Being a student of Islamic architecture, I was asked by some French friends of mine to accompany them on a visit to some Cairo monuments. I chose to take them to the Mosque of Sultan Hassan. Unfortunately, our visit was interrupted by a policeman who demanded to know why I was accompanying foreigners if I was not an official guide.

After explaining that I was a friend of theirs, I was repeatedly told that I needed to apply for permission to accompany my friends and that I would be taken to the nearest police station and charged for guiding without a licence.

Whilst protecting tourists' interests is unquestionably a noble endeavour, segregation has never been, nor will it be a solution. Ironically, the behaviour of this policeman, whose duty it is to protect foreigners in Egypt, did more harm than good. The experience was, indeed unpleasant for my friends and only served to show them the archaic mode of thinking that is hindering Egypt's development.

A greater sense of trust among Egyptians is necessary. When the sharing of knowledge among youth of different cultures is considered a crime rather than a fundamental step in promoting cross-cultural understanding, one begins to comprehend why so many talented Egyptian intellectuals have emigrated: they are seeking environments that promote the spreading of knowledge and where basic respect exists for every individual. Self El-Rashidi, Cairo

Foul play

Sir: This week I visited the Ambros House at El-Maamoun Street, Moharram Bey. This is the house that generated some interest earlier on this year, due to the fact that

Lawrence Durrell once lived in its tower rooms. Also, there are some indications that it is the place where the *Alexandria Quartet* were either written or inspired.

Both my grandparents lived on this same street when it was full of beautiful houses. They always told stories about the Ambros House's beautiful interior, lovely gardens and fantastic parties.

But my recent visit to the house left me feeling extremely appalled and upset. I was guided through the once splendid gardens, only to find them in shambles. However what really upset me was the inside of the house. Someone had sprayed plaster on the walls of the entrance, covering up the most beautifully coloured drawings on marble.

As usual, they did a very bad job, and some of the plaster was peeling, which explains how I saw underneath it. Also the fireplaces, the doors and the window seats were all ripped out. The caretaker who allowed us in claims that the Department of Antiquities took these relics to some sacred place.

However when I saw the plaster and what was underneath it, I suspected foul play. In my opinion, it seems that whoever has bought this house wants to hide its value so that the Department of Antiquities and any decent Egyptian authority responsible for preserving our heritage would find it worthless.

Through your newspaper, I am calling upon the authorities to investigate the matter and take some serious steps towards the preservation of what could be a great cultural attraction.

Those who plastered this magnificent wall are attempting to rob us of our heritage. It seems they are too stupid and ignorant to fathom the depth of this crime.

Dr Hanaa Ismail
Professor of Food Analysis
High Institute of Public Health
Alexandria University

Reflections By Hani Shukrallah

Kinds of Arabs

Under "the peace process" there are basically two kinds of Arabs: the terrorists and the hostages. Israel and the US hold the exclusive licence to define the first and punish the latter. The "head-over-heels" type of Arabs — to use Amr Moussa's now automatic expression, uttered in Amman — is for all practical purposes a sub-category of the hostages. This is not due to a lack of power or wealth, nor of fervent loyalty to "the peace process", but to their inability to generate any kind of viable consensus among their peoples.

The dovish labour leader, Shimon Peres, the man with the vision of a new Middle East, whose re-election as Israel's prime minister was proclaimed a national Arab duty, was a fascinating sight to see on world TV networks last Thursday. Having just massacred over a hundred Lebanese civilians, mostly women and children, and mutilated some 200 others, a stern-faced Peres — "You are looking very angry", a PR-minded Israeli journalist observed to the prime minister, underscoring the farce — told a news conference that "there had been no mistake" in bombing the Lebanese villages.

Driven from their homes by Peres's armed forces, which Western TV anchors and commentators never tire of describing as being among the best and strongest fighting machines in the world, this particular group of villagers were just too impoverished and destitute to make it further north. Like several thousand others in similar circumstances, they sought shelter and sanctuary in a UN base.

But, for Peres and his staff of Prussian officers, it is the Lebanese villagers who are to blame. Why didn't they listen to Israeli orders driving them out, not just away from their homes and villages but from a whole part of their country? More importantly, they share the same nationality as "Khizbullah"; they may even include some who sympathise with it. Besides, what guarantees does Israel have that some of the babies huddled on their mothers' breasts in the UNIFIL camp will not turn out to be Hezbollah supporters in 15 or 20 years?

"Khizbullah is to blame," the stern-faced Peres, his military foreign minister and his chief of staff, chorused firmly. The twisted — Nazi — logic of such statements made no impression, however, on the CNN anchors and commentators, who seemed mainly concerned with

the appropriate facial expression to adopt: bland smiles, learned objectivity, or muted concern.

It seems that where Arabs and Muslims are concerned, it is fairly easy for so-called liberals to goose-step under the old Nazi banner. That most liberal of American presidents, Bill Clinton, has been asserting this same kind of logic over and over again. Was it not Clinton, while on his tearful solidarity visit to Israel after Sharm El-Sheikh, who openly backed Israel's war of starvation against a million and a half Palestinians, blaming the Israeli closures and brutal repression on Hamas and Jihad terrorism?

Terrorism, one must assume — being such a popular concept — has some kind of legal and moral value that exists separately from the peculiar workings of the minds of such people as Peres, Clinton and John Major. Britain's *The Guardian*, one of the few Western media organs that still puts some store by such things as common decency and professional ethics, has listed the chronology of violence in South Lebanon as follows:

March 4: Hezbollah guerrillas kill four Israeli soldiers in the zone in south Lebanon occupied by Israel.

March 10: One Israeli soldier is killed in a Hezbollah bomb attack in the zone.

March 14: Five Israeli soldiers are wounded in a Hezbollah raid.

March 20: A Hezbollah suicide bomber kills one Israeli soldier near the border.

March 30: Israeli forces shell villages in south Lebanon, killing two civilians. Hezbollah fires Katyusha rockets into northern Israel.

April 8: A bomb kills a Lebanese boy in a guerrilla-held south Lebanon village.

April 9: Hezbollah fires Katyusha rockets into northern Israel, wounding 36.

April 10: Hezbollah shells the occupied zone, killing a soldier.

April 11 onwards: Israel launches multiple attacks.

Israel occupies "a zone" in South Lebanon and, when its occupation forces are attacked, this is called terrorism. Israel flaunts the 1993 agreement with Hezbollah prohibiting the targeting of civilians, and this is called "retaliation" against Hezbollah terrorism. Hezbollah retaliates by firing Katyusha rockets — largely ineffective — into northern Israel and, of course, in horror-struck tones, this is called terrorism. Israel massacres civilians by the hundreds, and this remains "retaliation". The mur-

dered and mutilated and their families have only "Khizbullah" to blame. The Western media reveals in the fact that a Katyusha rocket was fired 2-300 metres away from the UNIFIL camp.

Lebanese non-governmental organisations directed an appeal this week to their Arab counterparts. The following extract gives some indication of what "April 11 onwards" has meant:

"Since the 11th of this month of April Lebanon has been exposed to wide-scale Israeli aggression... resulting in massive destruction... an almost complete stoppage of vital services, including water and electricity as a result of the destruction of basic infrastructural and civil establishments, the siege of sea ports and the cutting of communications and the transport lines and supplies between the different regions. Add to this the forcible migration of 450,000 people towards the capital and other areas and the horrifying massacres committed against civilians, forcing them to escape their homes and villages, leaving 200 dead and 500 wounded, mostly women, children and elderly people. More dead lie under the rubble, and wounded lie besieged in more than 200 villages and towns."

The appeal cites two massacres, both committed on Thursday, 18 April. A whole family of 11 people, including six children, was annihilated under the rubble of their bombed home. As for the Fijian UNIFIL camp, in which several hundred people from the villages of Qana and Sidqin had sought shelter, the Lebanese NGO appeal recounts the following: "Israeli planes and war boats shelled the camp with 25 bombs, of 155 and 175 mm calibre. One hundred and eleven people were killed at once and 200 are very seriously injured. But Israeli terror did not stop at this. The international road connecting the south to Sidon and Beirut was bombed every half hour to prevent the transport of the injured to hospitals as well as to prevent the dispatching of medical aid to the injured, with the aim of ensuring the killing of the largest possible number. Hospitals in Tyre and the south overflowed with the injured, many of whom were placed in the corridors, and a single cover was available for every three injured persons."

Under the American-Israeli peace, code-named the peace process, there are two kinds of Arabs: the terrorists and the hostages.

Weavers and spinners

David Blake negotiates the near perfect geometry of Stravinsky's fractured hopes

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; *Masters of the 20th Century* (3); Brahms' double concerto in A minor for violin and cello; Abdel-Hamid El-Shoukhi (violin) and François Guye (cello); Igor Stravinsky *Le Sacre du Printemps*; Ahmed El-Saedi, conductor; Opera House, Main Hall; 19 April

On 29 May, 1913, it broke. The storm, the scandal, the biggest mug-up that musical Europe has ever witnessed and enjoyed. It was in the Theatre de Champs Elysees, Paris, and the cause was the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* by the Ballet Russe de Diaghilev, who had commissioned it. The prime cause of the scandal was Igor Stravinsky's music for the score of the ballet.

It is a fortunate era that can make of music a scandal. Things today have changed. No one cares enough; they just walk out or don't come at all. El-Saedi and the Cairo Symphony Orchestra beat around no bushes. They went straight into it.

Before the *Sacre* burst into flame at this concert we had a rather drowsy performance of Brahms' double concerto. Brahms writes "allegro" at the beginning of the score, but it is a very elastic allegro — troubled, vacillating, withdrawing, with the violin echoing the cello. Echo and Narcissus. The two soloists were active. El-Shoukhi (violin) and Guye (cello) were forward-toned and full of care for their colloquy over the watercolour tones of the Brahms orchestra. Their playing fitted the intimate chamber music scale.

This is very "classic Brahms"; no baring of hearts or emotion. A dryness arose as we went down memory lane. Mnemonic aid, carefully veiled, with no declamation and no urgency audible. This is Brahms being official and it had nothing to do with the soloists. Maybe El-Saedi might have given more urgency. Brahms sounded a bit thin, but it is difficult music, very devious, distraught and full of equivocation. The soloists are given tunes of beauty and depth and they were played with emotion. It was not emotion that was lacking. It was the difficulty of dealing with the sheer honesty of this composer. His approach is not to make one at all. There is much of Henry James about Brahms. So it is long and long-winded, yet somehow as short and direct as Bach. So it is lovely yet its center is steely-eyed and hurtful. All the sweep of the music was missed in this performance. Maybe it is Brahms,

suddenly old without all that facial hair. This is what is underneath. This concert took him to his barber, and we were left to cope with a new face.

So back to the *Rite of Spring*. It was not a shock. A simple statement, so vivid, powerful, direct and without much of the unnecessary noise which usually goes with maestro performances of this music. You've heard them before, they are on compact discs and yet none of them have caught the spirit of the *primtemps*, let alone the *sacre*, nor the fact that it was written for the ballet.

This showing was a ballet. A dance, a true rite. The men go to war as a balance in the blood bath of history. Pagan they call it. All this was delivered to the audience.

In 1913, with the Diaghilev company, it was performed only five times. In the end Stravinsky entered a hospital to recover from the chaos of the premiere. He should not have worried. The score is still very much with us and time has passed a generous judgment — a very lovable score. With this piece Stravinsky had found his voice at last. However the voice was so unique it needed future ages and other composers to use it. Stravinsky left it and went on to chase after other sounds.

They say the eerie pipe music which opens the *Rite* is in E flat major. Nijinsky composed the choreography for the first five performances. There were no others until 1920. Again scandal. Ten years later Philadelphia saw it as a success and, from then on, it more or less became choreographers' bottle meat. In the concert hall it is easily repre-



Nijinsky, choreographer of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*, as depicted by the Ballet Russe designer Léon Bakst

sent for what it is — a theatrical, visual experience. And so once again it is back on the symphonic concert circuit and that is probably where it will remain.

But there is more to it than waltzes thumping around through the jungle. Pierre Boulez makes much of the music floating off *plianissimo* into sheer shimmer. This, too, is the way of El-Saedi. He knows about noise and in the big bangs of Tchaikovsky he can deliver the decibels with the best of them. For this performance particularly he does what is his great strength as a conductor. He underlines the music, the myth, and leaves it naked to ruthless view, then calmly sets about redressing it in his own way.

We had therefore the entire *Rite of Spring*; the light from other constellations, their huge shadows falling across the music like black holes, the shudders which space gives to small human creatures balanced on the edge of a troubled, pathetic little planet. The screams in an undying night of fear and then large lozenge-like wafers of light

not from our sun and finally spume and sweat from the struggle of far galactic horizons. All this comes, as do the finest of things: water dripping into nothing, the sound of endlessly whirling spindles, the harvest arising from the seed and the dance — how it began unsteady, stealthy and carpeted by uncertainty. This is the earth, ours, and what we have done to it. Everything topples down the illimitable chute of cosmic garbage.

It is up to each listener to wring from out of himself the courage to face it and go on. El-Saedi gave the *Rite* with clarity. This is what maestros are for. They spring upon us truths and visions not experienced before.

To think that this was Cairo. The Cairo Symphony Orchestra and its resident conductor delivered this strange, abrasive score, one of the absolutes of 20th century music, in a manner worthy of Pierre Monteux. The result is overwhelming gratitude and love for a performance which wrought out of the chaos of now a geometry of fractured hope.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Maja Seric (Paintings)
El-Masara Arts Centre, Opera House Grounds, Gezira, Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 29 April.

Husseini Sharif
El-Masara Arts Centre, Opera House Grounds, Gezira, Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 30 April.

Images of Egyptian Life Through Travellers Eyes
Rare Books and Special Collections Library, AUC, El-Sheikh Riham St. Tel 577 5436. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 April.

Emmo Caccia (Graphics)
Zachary Centre of Arts, 1 El-Mohand El-Sayid St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 30 April.

Group Exhibition
Zachary Centre of Arts, as above. Until 3 May.

Abu Khalil Louty & Wagiba El-Chisti (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 3 May.

Rahis Shoukry (Paintings)
Opera Art Gallery, Opera House, Tel 342 0398. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 3 May.

Kamran Dawlaty (Paintings)
Salama Gallery, 36/4 Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 3 May.

Margo Vellon (Paintings and Drawings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Saad St, Zamalek. Tel 393 1754. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 15 May.

Georges El-Sabghy (Paintings)
Masraka Gallery, 8 Champeillon St, Downtown. Tel 578 4094. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 16 May.

Randa Shatha (Photographs)
Masraka Gallery, 8 Champeillon St, Downtown. Tel 578 4094. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 16 May.

Traditional Arts Fair & General Exhibition
El-Cherif Palace, El-Hussein. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 20 May.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahabeh (Photographs)
1 Kafour El-Ahmed St, Dokki. Tel 336 2376. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 3 May.

Egyptian Museum
Tahrir St, Downtown. Tel 573 4319. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 3 May.

Coptic Museum
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo. Tel 362 8766. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 3 May.

Islamic Museum
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bab El-Khalq. Tel 390 9920/9920. 1520. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 3 May.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 3 May.

Mohamed Nagat Museum
Children's Pyramid, 9 Mahmoud Al-Ghazali St, Zamalek. Tel 393 1072. Daily 10am-5pm. Until 3 May.

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FILMS

Salatore Giuliano
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Masara St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 25 April, 7pm. Directed by Francesco Rosi (1961).

Hatti
Indian Cultural Centre, 33 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3394. 25 April, 4pm. Starring Anish Bachchan.

Madame Bovary
French Cultural Centre, 1 Mohamed El-Hosary El-Farouki St, Moussara. Tel 354 7679. 30 April, 7pm. Directed by Claude Chabrol, based on the novel by Gustave Flaubert.

Cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday of the week in which it is checked with the cinema.

El-Nam El-Aghal (Sound Asleep)
Radda 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am-1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Racy Sq. Hippodrome. Tel 528 0344. Daily 10am-3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cinema 12. Ennassr St, Downtown. Tel 770 337. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Nessim St, Downtown. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Nessim St, Downtown. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

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Proust, past and present: to mark the Cairo publication of Elias Bedeiwi's translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, Al-Ahram Weekly assesses the influence of Proust on contemporary Egyptian writing

Adrift in the Proustian flux

Ibrahim Fathi follows the scent of Marcel Proust through recent Egyptian fiction

Many writers in Egypt know many things about Marcel Proust. They know that Proust, along with two other writers — Virginia Woolf and James Joyce — was among the pioneers of the stream of consciousness narrative. They know too that Proust was mainly concerned with the remembrance of time past. But this is really about as far as it goes. Things are known about Proust, though Proust himself remains for many inaccessible. Arabic translations of his work are scarce, generally abridged, and in the main have become available only recently.

Of course there are some writers and critics, and here I include Edwar El-Kharat and Amina Rashid, who by virtue of knowing French know Proust. Others, such as Naguib Mahfouz and Youssef El-Sharouni, know Proust through the English translation of Scott Moncrieff. Yet for by far the great majority of Egyptian writers and critics Proust has been mediated through secondary sources. He is a writer known chiefly through critical studies or notes in text books.

Among such secondary sources providing important insights into the world of Proust are the many books written on the French philosopher Henri Bergson. Bergson, unlike Proust, was translated into Arabic at an early stage. His work has been the subject of a great deal of commentary, commentary that almost invariably includes an acknowledgment of the influence of Bergsonian distinctions between the concepts of time and place on the writing of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*.

It is perfectly natural, of course, for the literary arena of any given country to absorb foreign literary influences and trends according to an internal and specific logic determined by the needs of particular writers in a specific period. In Egypt, for instance, Guy de Maupassant and Chekhov have exerted a massive influence on the Egyptian short story precisely because their techniques, for the longest period, responded to the developing needs of Egyptian short story writers as they sought to depict aspects of the individual self against a tradition of popular stories that concentrated mainly on the collective. The particularities of the process of absorption allowed Maupassant and Chekhov to be the mentors of both the romantic and realist Egyptian schools while ensuring also that the Egyptian short story, especially in the writings of its more accomplished practitioners, never became an imitation of imported models.

In short, the practice of Egyptian writers has been consistently distinguished by the interaction between an Egyptian reality, and the writers' own consciousness of this reality on the one hand, and available Western forms on the other.

Let us take Naguib Mahfouz as an example. Early in his career Mahfouz was familiar with the writings of both Proust and Virginia Woolf yet it is not until what might conveniently be termed his second, rather more philosophical phase — a response to a changing reality in which human characters could no longer be as certain as before — that he began to explore the possibilities afforded by the formal innovations of these two writers. For the great bulk of his early career he continued producing critical realist works, adapting and evolving the techniques of Balzac and Galsworthy. By the late fifties, however, we find the introduction of Proustian elements in his fiction, a process that would result in *Al-Shahadah* (The Beggar), of 1965, where memories of the past are linked with present feelings, resulting in a concretisation of time.

The protagonist of "The Beggar" is depicted during significant instants of his history. Yet in fracturing his conventional chronology Mahfouz's intention is to expose a parallel, psychological constancy, intimating to the reader those elements that remain consistent within the character of the protagonist and which span a history

of suffering that bring him to the brink of dissolution. In *Souza* (Picture/Image), a short story from the same period, Mahfouz further adapts Proustian narrative gambits. The murdered woman at the centre of the story is presented prismatically, from the fluctuating perspectives of those who knew her. The external world is consistently contrasted with internal landscapes, foregrounding the relative nature of truth and its dependency upon the angle of vision, the position and the psychological state of the various narrators.

Though Mahfouz utilised Proustian narrative structures for his own ends Youssef El-Sharouni and Edwar El-Kharat count among the first Arab writers to parallel stream of consciousness techniques in their own works. Yet any technical parallelism between El-Kharat and Proust becomes evident only in El-Kharat's late works, *Tawabha Za'faran* (City of Saffron) and *Ya Banat Iskandariya* (Girls of Alexandria). Narration, in these works, is a complex structure. There is an interplay of multiple themes. El-Kharat attempts to resurrect his narrator's life in a literary text beginning, in Proustian vein, with childhood, and imposing unity only through the agency of the narrator-protagonist. By constantly returning to the immediate data of consciousness, El-Kharat retains the wholeness of his narrator's experience. The essence of consciousness for El-Kharat is duration — Mikhail, a counterpart for El-Kharat, is set adrift in the flux of time, in a heterogeneous continuum, where the incongruous becomes a continuous quality and not a disrupted quantity. The moment remains the focus of an accumulated past, and a future about to happen. Every act, as Bergson insists, is merely another, new projection of the self.

El-Kharat's real quest, though, is directed towards permanency and identity within continuous flux. It is a search for fixed points, and in his search El-Kharat draws closer to Proust than to Bergson.

The symphonic composition of narrative themes, a significant component of Proust's innovative technical apparatus is used by Abdou Goubeir, in his two novels *Inkisar Al-Qalb* (The Breaking of the Heart) and *Ulat Radwan* (Radwan's Vacation). Both of these novels constitute an attempt to recapture times past, to describe an old world collapsing in the face of a rampant commercialism. Both novels comprise a narrative of exodus, articulated in a geometrical structure that assimilates and ascribes meanings to details. More precisely, duration and the stream of consciousness become the site of experimentation in these two novels. In the first Abdou Goubeir attempts to drive internal monologue to the edge of dialogue, pushing the relativism of the narrator's vision to the

brink of isolation and non-communication. In the second novel there is a Proustian recapturing of the past self, resistant to loss, continuing in dreams and reveries as things fall apart.

Radwan, in "Radwan's Vacation", hopes to discover the new free zone city, Port Said, and in the process re-creates a past through the act of remembrance. The process operates simultaneously on both the internal and external worlds, and through the multiple layers of memory. The past continues in the touch of things, their smell and taste, and in the annals of memory. It is a continuity that comes to constitute a spiritual struggle against time,

searching out an anchor in its unending folds.

Abdel-Hakim Qassem's *Ayam Al-Insan Al-Sab'a* (The Seven Days of Man) is yet another Egyptian novel that makes nods in the direction of Proust. Once again we notice a very Proustian parallelism. The novel focuses on the disintegration of a village Sufi group which represented, in the consciousness of the child-narrator Abdel-Aziz, a source of security, an alternative to a cruel, peasant existence.

The disintegration of the group is a function of the corrosiveness of time. Yet in plotting this disintegration, and the changing consciousness of the child narrator, Qassem refuses compartmentalisation. The character of the child narrator is not fixed around a solid kernel but, as in Proust, is submerged in a time that destroys everything in its path, that makes the solidity of architecture as fugitive as the years, but which allows for the reconstruction of individual consciousness. True, the continuity of the characters is consistently disrupted, but there exist too those moments of spiritual sublimity or physical ecstasy, during which the narrator's intuition of the continuity of self is formed.

All this — developing consciousness, the attrition of the passing of time — happens against a backdrop of coarseness and ugliness in front of which nothing is possible except the attempt to recapture past selves. The novel implicates a whole social world, criticising it bitterly, though without ever becoming the human comedy which some critics insist constitutes Proust's oeuvre, for in Qassem's novel the subjective is accomplished by an objective dimension, narrated by a child who has access to complete knowledge.

Proust, as he appears within Egyptian literature, comprises a technical apparatus the components of which have been used selectively. He casts a shadow, a shadow carried in the many critical writings on him that have been translated into Arabic and enjoyed wide circulation. He has not hardened into the monolith of a single coherent influence. Egyptian writers have proceeded in picking and choosing from Proust rather than taking the whole edifice on board. His influence on the writing of Egyptian fiction is at best diffused and non-specific. It is a hint — no more, really, than a fragrance.



Points of departure

What influence does Proust exert on contemporary Egyptian fiction? Al-Ahram Weekly conducts a straw poll of writers

Mohamed El-Bisatie:

"I have never read Proust. Few Egyptian novelists have, because most do not read English or French, and for many years the only available translations comprised small segments of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. The work was not really accessible and for many years those who had read Proust comprised a small minority."

Gamal El-Chitani:

"There is a strange thing about Proust, and that is the inaccessibility of his influence. Because I do not read French, my acquaintance with his work started only in the early '60s, when I read the Arabic translation of Leon Edel's *Al-Qissa Al-Saykologia* (The Psychological Novel). Yet I think I was influenced by Proust before I came across Edel's lengthy chapter on Proust and Joyce, which included quotations from *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Later I read a lot about him but still did not read his major oeuvre. There is, admittedly, some resemblance between my work and his, certainly in the quest for time past."

It was only in the late '70s that I began to read *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. By that time Elias Bedeiwi had embarked on the huge project of translating Proust. I read the first three parts of the novel and my reading confirmed my earlier impressions about Proust. I deeply admire his work. Undoubtedly his work is among the most important of the century. Indeed, I read the first sections of *A la Recherche* more than four times and constantly return to them. They were half a century late in coming."

Sonallah Ibrahim:

"I have not read Proust in French, Arabic or English. This, though, has happened through coincidence rather than design. Everything one reads about him tempts one to read him, but there are so many other things one wants to read."

Edwar El-Kharat:

"Though my relationship with Proust could be described as intimate it is not as close as my relationship with another novelist I am often asked about, namely James Joyce."

I read Marcel Proust relatively late. When I was a political prisoner, between 1948 and 1950, I improved my French to the extent that it became possible for me to read both classical and modern French literature. It was then that I became acquainted with Proust.

On several occasions I have been asked about the influence of Proust and Joyce. My usual reply is that the difficulty of the response is a function of its impossibility. I have lived and devoured my readings: at 14, I experienced the British Romantics with an ecstasy later known only in my deepest moments of love. Then I hit upon the Russian greats — from Gogol, passing through, indeed falling under the spell, of the great Dostoyevsky, to the awe-inspiring world of Tolstoy. As for Joyce, I loved *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* then I began to delve into *Ulysses*, but it was so overwhelming that I put it aside and only later read it in its entirety. And this is exactly what happened with Proust. Who can begin to unravel those intricate threads, threads which I found so deeply entwined with the very rudiments of my existence?

Doris Lessing has written that I am more akin to Proust than to Durrell — "comparable", as she put it. The comparison was also made by the well-known Arabist and translator, Denys Johnson-Davies who said that my similarly complex style made the translation of my work very difficult. Given that I wrote *Hitan 'Alva* (High Walls), with its complex style, before I became acquainted with Proust, I think about the possibility of a spiritual kinship, a shared devotion to the inner workings of the soul and the subtleties of language.

After having read Proust... I was somewhat taken aback — though ultimately I was not really surprised at all after I gave it some thought — that the past for him is not a period of time that has ended. Rather, it is ever-present and timeless. This is precisely how I view the past. To me the past is ever-present. I have no "memories", but experiences that continue to live with me until now. And the key-word here is "now", which transcends the bounds of the present. The present is ephemeral, whereas the "now" for me is an interrupted continuum."

Plain Talk

I was very happy when I was chosen, with the visiting English poet Lawrence Saul, to be one of the judges for the finals of the English Poetry Festival organised by Anne El-Bolkary, Pamela Ramadan and Carole Addas. I was happy because, as a lover of poetry, and a past winner of four prizes for English sonnet composition, I have always welcomed any effort to encourage both the writing and reading of poetry.

Underlying the Festival, designed for schools preparing for the Cambridge IGCSE, was the desire to give the pupils the opportunity to compete "on a cultural level" in both the writing and reciting poetry. The aim of poetry in schools, explains the introduction to the programme, "is not only to encourage children to be creative, but to improve and increase their knowledge of English from an early age". Interestingly enough, though the competition was aimed at boys and girls between the ages of 8 and 15, the committee received written poems from children as young as seven.

Over a dozen language schools participated in the recital competition. In two events, individual and choral, set pieces were chosen for each of the three age groups along with a poem selected from the competition. It was a pleasure watching and listening to the pupils in their school uniforms reciting simple, humorous poems by such famous poets as Ogden Nash, Wordsworth and others. It was clear that the pupils were enjoying the event.

The Festival confirms the continued interest in poetry. Statements to the contrary are mainly due to the shortage of poetry magazines and publishers ready to publish poetry. The old days witnessed a proliferation of magazines and series of poetry collections. Going through my rather modest library I came upon *Poetry London*, *Poetry Quarterly*, *Poetry from Oxford*, *Poetry from Cambridge*. I also discovered a beautiful edition of A. E. Housman's *A Shropshire Lad*, published by the Richards Press in London in the 1940s.

Certainly that decade appears to have been a golden age for the publication of poetry. I well remember, during that decade, going to poetry recitals at such places as Music for All, the Victory Club, the British Institute and at private houses. It seems that poetry pours forth at times of hardship and during youth. I think it was Schopenhauer who said that young people write poetry while the older generations write prose.

The importance of poetry in our lives can be gleaned from our reserves of poetic lines, committed to memory and invoked at certain times. Sitting by myself I remember such poems as Rupert Brooke's "The Great Lover", James Flecker's "The Old Ships", Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" and W. B. Yeats's "When You Are Old".

Egypt enjoys a host of poetry recitals organised on national and cultural occasions. The composition of poems and verses to mark special occasions proves that poetry is a living not dead art.

There is no doubt that the Arab contribution to world culture consists of poetry. The famous pre-Islamic *muallafat*, translated into English by Professor Gibb, illustrates that poetry was a common and widely-used language. May it continue to be so.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Sentence for life

To translate Proust is a monumental task. May El-Telmissani examines the result of Elias Bedeiwi's life-long project

Several Arabic translations of the first parts of Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* have appeared in recent years. Among the most outstanding are Samia Assad's *Manazil Swann* (*Du côté de chez Swann*) and Nazmi Louka's *Gharan Swann* (*Un amour de Swann*), neither of which, however, received the kind of media coverage accorded Elias Bedeiwi's translation of *Du côté de chez Swann*, (translated as *Ganib Manazil Swann*), re-printed in Cairo by Dar Sharghiyat in association with the Centre Français de Recherche et Coopération.

Bedeiwi's translation, which first appeared in Damascus in the seventies, is the fruit of a life-long project to translate the seven parts of Proust's work. (Four parts have already appeared in Damascus, and there are plans to publish them soon in Cairo.) The ambition of Bedeiwi's project is similar in scale to Sami El-Deroubi's translation of the works of Dostoyevsky. Both are to be lauded as valuable additions to the Arabic library.

That one translator should pit himself against such a monumental work is indeed a formidable challenge. Proust's *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is not just enormously long — more than 500 pages per part in the Gallimard edition — it is a far from straightforward text. It is a work of delicate different and contrasting worlds, each lineating different and social codes. Even if the translator is conversant with all these codes, and thus able to communicate them to the Arab reader, the work will still present a linguistic barrier, given Proust's penchant for lengthy, complex sentences. The Proustian sentence is complex in its structure and in its use of vocabulary. Flowing

over tens of lines at times, it attenuates the possibilities of syntactical grammar, as when the main verb in the sentence comes several lines after the subject. There is also the merging of several levels of narrative and narrative voices within a single sentence.

Relevant in this context are the views of Leo Spitzer, the German critic who wrote one of the most interesting stylistic studies of Proust. For Spitzer the complexity of the Proustian sentence attests to the complexity of the world itself and of our perception of it. Proust formulates his world view almost geometrically; levels succeed one another and are interwoven in the sentence without ever upsetting its general structure. In organising his sentences, Proust uses all manner of punctuation marks, as well as brackets for lengthening the sentences and isolating certain phrases. He may also repeat a word within the same sentence, employing it in a different context, also for the purpose of lengthening the sentence. To reach the end of a sentence becomes a form of deliverance, relieving the reader and revealing the hidden meaning. According to Spitzer a good memory is a prerequisite for reading Proust, for without this faculty it would be impossible to follow the segments of the sentence to the end, separating and analysing each element while reading.

Through its very complexity, the Proustian sentence gives us an impression of reality rather than reality itself. It reveals an apparent complexity while refraining from giving any direct hint as to the strategies that might be involved in unravelling hidden depths.

Proust also makes much use of phrases of com-

parison, distinguishing between two objects or situations, repetitive formulations such as "it is either this or that", and repeatedly uses conjunctive sentences. Thus we have the 50-line sentence in the 1988 Gallimard edition of *Du côté de chez Swann* — a page-length sentence in a medium-sized book. It is a sentence that starts, as usual, with a capital letter and ends with a full-stop. In the extract below the narrator describes the different rooms in which, over the years he has awoken, and which he recollects successively as in a kinoscope. He begins the sentence with the word "mais" (but), though this is a false start as the sentence is a thematic extension of the previous sentence. In the original the narrator says: "Mais j'avais revu tantôt l'une, tantôt l'autre, des chambres que j'avais habitées dans ma vie, et je finissais par me les rappeler toutes dans les longues reveries qui suivaient mon sommeil; chambres d'hiver ou quand on se couche, on se blottit la tête dans un nid qu'on se tresse avec les choses les plus disparates: un coin de l'oreiller, le haut des couvertures, un bout de chaise, le bord du lit, et un numéro des 'Débats roses', qu'on finit par cimenter ensemble selon la technique des oiseaux en s'y ap-



A drawing by Proust

payant indéfiniment; ou par un temps glacial le plaisir qu'on goûte est de se sentir séparé du dehors (comme l'hirondelle de mer qui a son nid au fond d'un souterrain dans la chaleur de la terre), et ou, le feu..."

We note the frequent use of the comma and the semi-colon to break the sentence, as well as the enumeration of tangible and concrete elements after the colon and the presence of many clauses that start with connectors like "ou" — a structure that recurs throughout the rest of the sentence in the description of summer rooms. In keeping with the logic of the sentence — a comparison between the winter rooms and summer rooms the narrator has occupied at different moments in his life — each is accorded a generous number of adjectives and verbs.

A comparison between the work in the original and in Arabic translation shows that Bedeiwi has preserved the structure of the lengthy sentence and its typography. One departure from the original, however, is that the comma is often replaced by *wa* (and) in the Arabic translation. A number of punctuation marks have likewise been deleted in favour of the flowing Arabic sentence. It is also noticeable that the translator sometimes resorts to inserting a word to clarify an ambiguity in the original or to render the Arabic text more poetic.

Thus, for example, "je vois" (I see) is rendered as "yatassama li an ara" (it is possible for me to see).

Such minor alterations aside, Bedeiwi's remains an accurate translation, faithful to the structure and verbal assonance of the Proustian sentence. It is also interesting to note that some of the Arabic structures bear the imprint of the translator's grounding in Syro-Lebanese literary Arabic. The Arabic text is thus closer to the writings of Gibran Khalil Gibran in linguistic texture than to, say, the novels of Naguib Mahfouz. An example of Syro-Lebanese usage is in the opening sentence of the work where we read "ayyayna... lughimidan" (my eyes close) instead of the more familiar usage "lughimidan". Names, too, have been transliterated according to Syro-Lebanese phonetics (as opposed to Egyptian pronunciation): "Golo" is rendered as "Gholo", "Germannes" as "Ghemmanes".

Such usage, unfamiliar as it is to the Egyptian reader, in no way detracts from the merit of the translation; rather it renders the text more poetic. Bedeiwi is to be lauded for preserving and rendering the spirit of the original — a feat which many Arabic translations from foreign literature have been unable to accomplish. Indeed, a number of Syro-Lebanese translations have favoured the literalness of the text over its literariness, devoting a great deal of effort to finding the equivalent of words while overlooking sentence structure, the vehicle of the writer's intellectual edifice. Bedeiwi has admirably succeeded in rendering the rhythm of the Proustian sentence — a significant feature of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*. Thus, he has managed to recuperate a major part of the lost text; signs that are often forfeited in translation.

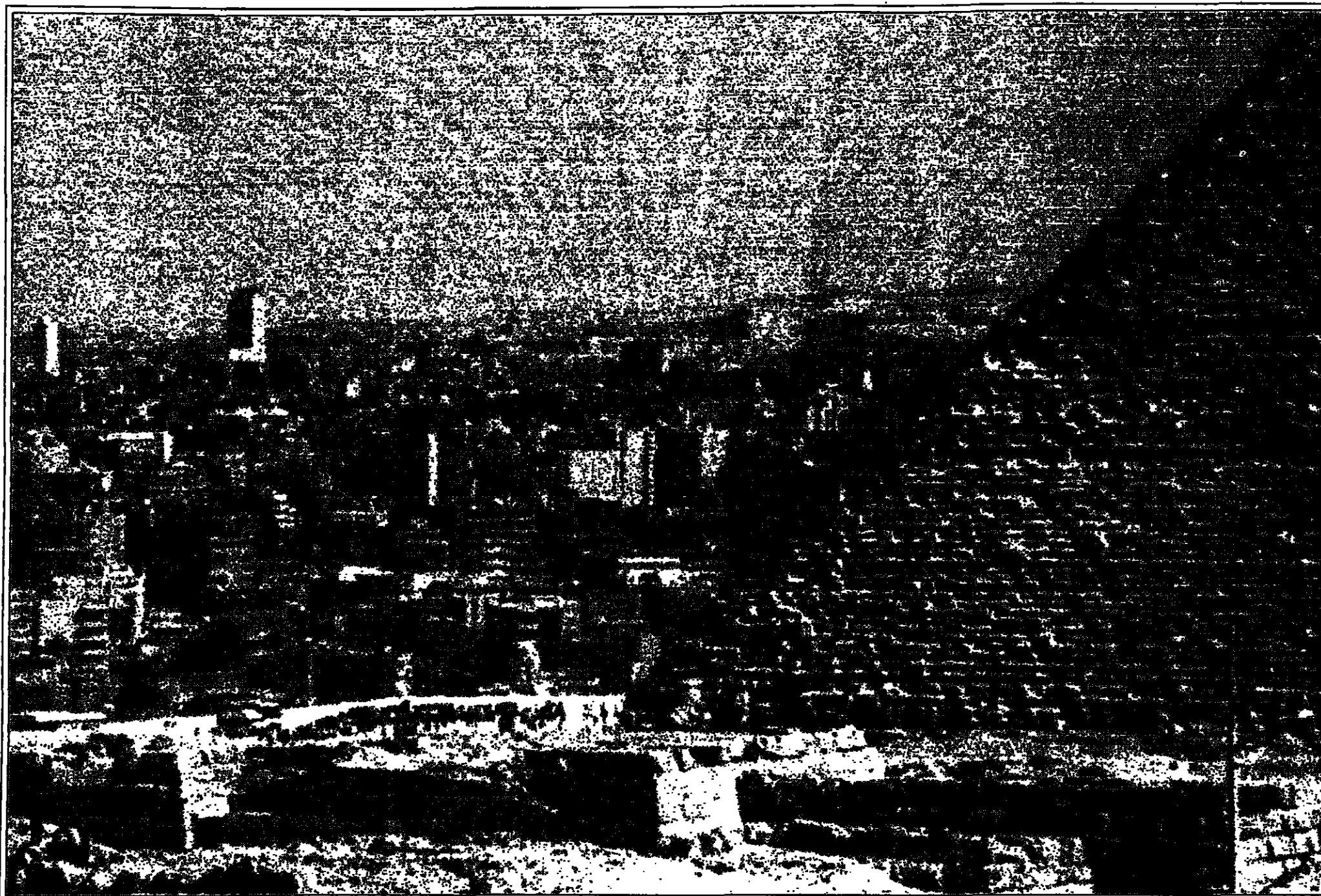


photo: Sherif Sonbol

Where ancient meets modern

Photographer Sherif Sonbol captures the expansion of urban development in Giza, while Jini Kamil traces the events that led to the disappearance of green fields

Not so many years ago — until the 1960s in fact — one could stand on the Giza Plateau, look westwards towards the Mogattam Hills on the western bank of the Nile, and see little else but fertile farmland. This land was annually inundated by the Nile which, when the waters withdrew, left a layer of rich alluvial soil. When planted, this fertile soil gave way to green field after green field, following each other with almost monotonous regularity.

Today, this agricultural land has been largely lost, with only a few pockets remaining. This photograph shows how buildings have crept to the very edge of the Giza Plateau, site of the pyramids.

It was the completion of the High Dam at Aswan in 1971 which

brought an end to the annual inundation. The river was harnessed, what had been a floodplain dried out, and permanent buildings could be erected there for the first time.

Construction was slow at first. One piece of land was bought from the farmers, then another, and gradually the momentum increased. It was hard to estimate how much of the enriched "black land" was being lost to development every year, not only in Giza, but all over Egypt. Some said that the amount of land under development equalled all of that reclaimed by the dam.

In Giza, construction continued untrammelled until new buildings covered the floodplain as completely as the flood waters had done in earlier times. By the time a law was tabled to protect

the land, it was too late.

The unexcavated ruins of the Valley Temple of the "Great Pyramid" of Khufu lay in the path of construction, and was built over. It was only excavated in the 90s during the laying of sewage pipes. The village of Nezzet El-Siman at the foot of the plateau crept insidiously towards the sacred plateau until the residents could all but shake hands with the Sphinx.

Cairo has now become the pulsating "Greater Cairo", a concrete jungle and home to some 14 million people. From the Giza Plateau, domes, minarets and modern steel and plate glass buildings can be seen vying for space against an ever-more polluted skyline.

Treasures as ambassadors

An exhibition of Pharaonic artefacts opened in Ohio and a photography exhibition of Egyptian landscapes in Hong Kong, reports Sherine Nasr

Until mid-May, Nefertiti's famous Berlin bust will be proudly posing for cameras in the Cleveland Museum in Ohio, USA, and is causing quite a stir. Visitors have been queuing up to peer at the queen's beautiful face — one of the most perfectly preserved and magnificent relics of Ancient Egypt.

The bust was the creation of the chief sculptor of the Pharaoh Akhenaton, Nefertiti's husband. Apart from its unquestionable artistic merit, it has noteworthy features: the face and neck

of the 48cm high bust is made of limestone while its blue-coloured crown is made of gypsum. This is an unprecedented attempt to combine both materials into one work of art.

Although this was a "trial" bust, believed to have been fashioned as a standard for sculpture, the colours are natural and bright. The queen's complexion is pink, her lips are crimson, her eyes lined in black and the decorations on the crown are yellow, green and blue. Unlike most female

statues, the head lacks even a single lock of hair: Nefertiti is entirely bald.

Sixty other items are also on display at the museum. These include some of the most noteworthy examples of Ancient Egyptian art: a granite head of a sphinx; the head of Amenhotep III, the famous 18th Dynasty pharaoh who built the Temple of Luxor; a broad granite relief of Ramses VI; and a dyad (twin statues) of Amenhotep III and Nefertiti. The items form a part of the Louvre collection and were sent to the

Cleveland Museum under tight security. The exhibition will be open until mid-May and several thousands of visitors are expected daily.

Meanwhile, on the other side of the world, a photography exhibition opened at the Hong Kong Museum of Art. The theme, once again, was Egypt. The land of the Nile cast a spell on 38-year-old Chinese photographer Dodo Jing Ming who, while travelling to Giza, Luxor, Aswan and the Fayoum, saw beyond ancient

monuments. She was fascinated by the geological formations of the petrified forest on the Qattamiya-Ain Sokhna Road, east of the Cairo suburb of Maadi. Although a large part of the fossil trunks have been swept aside by the paved road and cement factories, enough remained to be dramatically captured by her lens. The exhibition was inaugurated by Ali Maher El-Dali, the Egyptian consul to Hong Kong, and the photographs will be compiled in a book.



Part of what was once a rambling city

photo: Michael Stock



The decorated basin

photo: Samir Naoum

Ages of wine

An ancient winery has been discovered at the Christian settlement of Abu Mina, reports Samir Naoum

German archaeologists working in collaboration with the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) have discovered one of the world's largest ancient wineries, at the monastic centre of Abu Mina in Maryut, east of Alexandria.

"Excavations had already revealed a complex of churches, streets, shops, store rooms, baths and wells. Now we can add a winery," commented Mohamed Abdel-Aziz, head of East Delta Coptic and Islamic monuments at the SCA. "The site was a huge settlement in its heyday, and this discovery adds to its importance."

Abu Mina lies at the northern edge of the Western Desert, and was one of the largest pilgrimage sites in the early Christian era. The grave of Saint Mina, from whom the area takes its name, became associated with miraculous cures, and pilgrims from all over Christendom travelled there.

But the whole city was lost some time in antiquity. It lived on mainly through the Christian oral tradition; the only written evidence that it had ever existed was contained in the works of Medieval scholars, themselves fascinated by the legendary Abu Mina. The mystery of the vanished city attracted many scholars to the area, but it was not until 1907 that the German, Carl Kaufmann, discovered the tomb of Saint Mina. Around the tomb were scattered large numbers of pottery phials, added evidence that he had found what he was looking for. These phials would

have been filled with sacred water and sold to the thousands of pilgrims making the journey to the tomb.

Wine production equipment, discovered near the main basilica of Saint Mina, includes weights for weighing the grapes, and vats and basins for different stages of wine production. "The work was carried out in stages," explained Abdel-Aziz. "First the grapes, which were brought in baskets from nearby farms, were placed in a huge vat and trampled by foot. The resulting mush was then transferred to other containers, which were connected by channels through which the liquid passed during the successive stages where the grapes were further compressed. The last basin is decorated with the head of a lion, and the wine would have emerged from its open mouth." Fermentation occurred naturally during the process, he added, and the liquid was then poured into containers and stored. Some of the vessels found at the site are inscribed with the winery's own trademark.

A number of elegant marble columns were also unearthed at the site of the winery. These, Abdel-Aziz suggested, are from a palace, probably belonging to the owner of the winery.

Viticulture was a highly developed industry from ancient times in Egypt. Ezzat Mansour, documentation director of the SCA, cited scenes on Gracco-Roman reliefs dating from around 210BC in the tomb of Petosiris at Tuna El-Gabal, south-west of Minya. These reliefs

show how grapes were collected, squeezed by foot, and poured into special pottery containers.

But in fact viticulture goes back even further, to the First Dynasty, around 3,000BC. There is evidence of a wine-press hieroglyphic, and numerous Old Kingdom tombs have scenes of workers collecting grapes, treading them and squeezing out the juice, with the aid of a cloth twisted between two sticks. Grapes also feature prominently in Coptic art.

Friezes, and the capitals of columns often feature grapes as a symbol of holy communion, since Jesus Christ used wine to symbolise his blood at the Last Supper with his disciples. It is interesting to note, therefore, that there is evidence that the wine produced at Abu Mina was intended not only for domestic consumption, but for export abroad to other eastern Mediterranean countries.

Excavations at Abu Mina continue. Since its 1907 discovery, work on the site has been sporadic, with different parts of the city being uncovered only slowly. However, in 1979 UNESCO recognised the unique importance of the ancient city and placed it on its World Heritage List of protected sites.

And, as the historical significance of Abu Mina is painstakingly uncovered, the importance of the area as a religious centre has been restored by the large and impressive Monastery of St Mina, founded in 1959, and lying a mere 200 metres from the ancient city.

How to get there?

In a new service for readers, the Weekly gives up-to-date travel details

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Helipolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurgada and Shua.

Cairo-Alexandria

Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza, airport. Tickets: from city LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.

A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Port Said

Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said

Service 6.45am, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza. Departs Hurgada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurgada

Service 8pm, from Ramsis Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurgada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

East Delta Bus Company

Buses travel to north Sinai, south Sinai, Suez and Ismailia. Buses to Ismailia and Suez depart from Qalati (near Ramsis Square), Almaza and Tagneed Square (near Helipolis). Buses to north and south Sinai depart from the Sinai bus station at Abbasiya Square.

Cairo-Ismailia

Services every 45 minutes from 6.30am to 6pm, from Qalati, then Almaza, Tagneed Square. Tickets: deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5.25, both each way.

Cairo-Suez

Services every half an hour from 6am to 7pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tagneed Square. Tickets: deluxe bus LE5.75; air-conditioned bus LE5, both each way.

Cairo-Arish

Services daily from 7.30am until 4pm, from Qalati, then Almaza and Tagneed Square. Tickets: deluxe bus LE21; air-conditioned bus LE13, both each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Services 7am, from Abbasiya, then Almaza. Tickets morning LE27; evening LE40, both each way.

Cairo-Niweila

Service 8am, from Abbasiya, then Almaza. Tickets: deluxe bus LE31.

West Delta Bus (Sahm Zahabi)

Stations at Tahrir and Almaza.

Cairo-Hurgada

Services 9am, noon, 3pm, 10.30pm, 10.45pm and 11pm. Tickets LE30 each way.

Cairo-Safage

Services 9am and 3pm. Tickets LE35 each way.

Cairo-Quesier

Service 10pm. Tickets LE38 each way.

Cairo-Luxor

Service 9am. Tickets LE35 each way.

Cairo-Aswan

Service 5pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station.

Luxor and Aswan

Hungarian trains Services 7.15pm, 7.45pm, and 9pm. Tickets Cairo-Luxor: first class (single cabin) LE89; second class (double cabin) LE51. Cairo-Aswan: first class LE91; second class LE56, all each way.

French trains

Services 7.40pm, 9pm (reaching Aswan 8.40am 10am). Tickets LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians. Services to Luxor 7.45pm. Tickets LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians.

Spanish trains

Services to Aswan 6.45pm and 10pm. Tickets first class LE63; second class LE37. Services to Luxor 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets first class LE51; second class LE31.

Cairo-Alexandria

Torbid trains VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.

Normal trains

Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.

French trains

Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said

Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

Cairo-Aswan

Flights 6am, 6.30am, 10.30am, and 5pm. Tickets LE300 for Egyptians, LE991 for foreigners, both return.

Cairo-Luxor

Flights 6.15am, 7.30am, 10.30am and 5pm. Tickets LE220 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both return.

Cairo-Hurgada

Flights 7.15am, and 4pm. Tickets LE238 for Egyptians, LE780 for foreigners, both return.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh

Flight 6.45am. Tickets LE246 for Egyptians, LE621 for foreigners, both return.

Search for a customer feast: Tarek Atia finds... down by... frustration... makers... Fayoum...

Her night go upn

Henna... ed with... tacking... Maklad...

Next Sunday children will enjoy fireworks while henna-painted brides anticipate blessings for marrying during *Eid El-Adha*

Bomb-makers blues

Searching for a quaint feast fable, Tarek Atia finds himself kicked out of town by the frustrated fireworks makers of Fayoum



photos: Sherif Soudki

"It's made by kids, played by kids," say El-Nazla's elders, who would much rather be involved in any other business but *bomb*. The tiny gunpowder fireworks, say police, are a public nuisance

Tracing the origins of most of the noise in your neighbourhood this weekend might lead to El-Nazla, a village about 100km from Cairo. There, for the past month, home-made assembly lines have been working full speed to transform piles of pebbles and scrap paper, spools of coil, and barrels of gunpowder into handy packages of *eid* fireworks, lovingly called *bomb*, and currently exploding right outside your window.

But being blamed for noise pollution would almost be a breath of fresh air for El-Nazla's bomb-makers. Fireworks is the only business they know, and difficult circumstances, including increased police surveillance after a freak hijacking and fierce competition from sparklers made in China, have driven the normally friendly population into a far more tense frame of mind.

"*Bomb*?" said the first lady we met, manning a tiny soda pop stand. "There's no *bomb* here. I don't make *bomb*. I've never made *bomb*. I don't know anything about *bomb*. God curse such things. I would never consider making *bomb*."

Her tirade was in response to the simple question: "Do you know anyone in town who makes *bomb*?"

"No one here makes *bomb*," volunteered an old man standing nearby.

"that's somewhere else..."

But then a young man who had been following us down the road for a while pulled my sleeve and said, "Listen. I'll show you someone who makes *bomb*." He led us to a house two doors down. "In there," he pointed, "they're making *bomb*."

What we walked into turned out to be the typical scene in nearly every single house in the vicinity: three men sitting around a gigantic laundry *ushl* filled with a mountain of the gunpowder bombs, busily packing the goods into pre-prepared bags. *Galabiyas* tucked between *tights* and knees, their eyes drifted in tandem from the scooping they were doing to the TV screen in the corner, where Zamek were beating El-Mehalla 2-0.

The atmosphere was immediately tense. We had interrupted a very casual afternoon of work. Introducing ourselves as journalists made things worse. Hospitality was the only barrier. I soon realised, to a swift kick in the rear.

The illusion that had driven us here, the quaint feast fable about a village on the outskirts of Fayoum, a picture-perfect valley of palm trees and pasture where everyone makes fireworks, was just as quickly shattered. "It's been written about so many times before, how's it go-

ing to help the country or anyone to write it again?" asked first one, two then all three of the men packing the *bomb*.

We sat in silence for a while. "Why don't you write about why we don't have a post office yet?" asked an older man who was supervising the others. This was too ironic: in the '50s El-Nazla saw screen time in *Al-Bustagi*, a Tewfik El-Hakim screenplay about a bored village postman who reads everybody's mail, filmed here on location.

But mail was just the tip of their iceberg of woes. Foremost was the feeling that their work meant nothing to them. "It's kids stuff. *Bomb* is for kids," they said, nearly in unison, and all with extreme distaste. "It's made by kids, played by kids."

Against my better judgment, I said: "You wouldn't be referring to yourself, would you? I mean I see you making *bomb* right now..."

The question was belligerent, and it angered one of the young men enough to launch him into a spiel about the all-important distinctions between making and packing *bomb*. "We just pack it..." His companions nodded in agreement. Actually, the village children are the ones who make the fireworks, spending their days wrapping two or three tiny pebbles and some gunpowder in two pieces of

paper, then tying it together with coil. The piles get larger and larger, until laundry *tights* up and down the street are full enough for the men to do the real work, the counting and packing, the quality control (virtually none), the delivery of goods to the distributor and finalising of the sale.

"Anyway," asked the young man, "if there was any other business, do you think we'd be doing this?"

It is unclear how many of El-Nazla's approximately 25,000 residents make *bomb*, but many have been doing so for about 60 years. These days, however, everyone seems at the edge of despair. Officially, what they do is illegal, and lately, the police's attitude has not been as permissive.

Last month's extremely strange hijacking of an EgyptAir flight, with the assailants threatening the pilot with a lethal combination of gunpowder and duty free brands, has put authorities on more of an alert. Eight barrels of gunpowder were recently confiscated from El-Nazla, and residents have become more suspicious of everyone and more careful about what they say and do.

Their livelihood depends on both the continued popularity of their locally-manufactured fireworks, and the fragile network of lorries and middle men who

get the *bomb* to kiosks across the country. The People's Assembly seems intent on passing laws against the fireworks, but police soften up every *eid*. Nobody wants to dampen the holiday spirit any more than "modern times" already have, so *bomb* enjoys what is often referred to as a "semi-illegal" status. In other words, for the most part, it is tolerated.

Almost everybody has gone through several stages of *bomb* love-hate. As a kid, it's awesome. Boy or girl, there's nothing you look forward to more than spending *eid* morning on the balcony terrorising passers-by. Boom, crash, pow, the louder the sound, the sweeter the victory. Everyone has a story about hiding under the bed after a mega-4-small-bombs-taken-apart-to-make-a-super-slammer-*bomb* hit the wrong passer-by, that is, the one guy who's had enough of it all, and decides to stalk up the building stairs and shout up a storm about "don't you know how to bring your kids up properly?"

Giggle, giggle, giggle. That is, until, suddenly, *bomb* isn't that important anymore. And suddenly, you're the irate guy who, struggling for some morning shut-eye, curses the neighborhood kids transforming the street into a war-zone. And one day, it's you bounding up the stairs in

outrage after a "harmless" little *bomb* explodes an inch from your head.

For a month before *eid*, El-Nazla tenses up. Will police crack down this year? Have the gunpowder bombs, like a good kid gone bad, developed enough of a reputation to warrant stronger disciplinary action?

"It's because of what boys do to girls..." says one of the young men stuffing bombs. A young woman in Cairo agrees, saying, "Yes, I hate it when those things explode all around me... the little boys think it'll impress us..."

A couple of days after the feast, most of El-Nazla's males have gone to Cairo to look for work. They've left their garden of Eden, to work as itinerant construction hands, anything to make ends meet.

"I sell clocks in front of Galal El-Sharawi theatre," says one. "*Bomb* is only big for a month or so before the *eid*. How else am I going to feed my wife and kids for the rest of the year?"

We left town with our heads down. And as we passed through stepped fields of ever more greener growing, I caught sight of a sign: Join the National Youth Projects, it said, a chance for out of work youth to grow olives with the help of the government. It sounded like a dud. One of those defective gunpowder bombs.

Henna nights go upmarket

Henna nights, originally a tradition associated with *fellahin* and the urban poor, are now tickling the fancies of the rich. Jasmine Maklad looks at this growing trend

She presses down gently onto Nihal's skin with a small cone-shaped plastic bag. The mixture oozing out of the tiny hole at the end of the cone is cold and tickles as it moves delicately in patterns of a rich brown colour. It is the night before Nihal's wedding and she is having henna drawn on her ankles. Her family and close friends have joined her for this special event — *Lailat El-Henna* (henna night), which has evolved into the equivalent of a bridal shower for Egypt's elite.

Nihal is not alone. Today, in Cairo, hundreds of prospective brides plan their henna nights almost as carefully as they do their weddings. Usually held at the bride's house, food and drink are provided, special people are brought in to draw the designs and some families even hire entertainers. The bride is painted first, being the star of the moment, and her girlfriends and relatives wait anxiously for their turn to apply designs to various parts of their bodies. "The henna night is really fun and lively," said Amina, who held one before she was married. "It is a nice atmosphere and very comforting to have your friends around you, especially with all the stress of the wedding building up."

These henna nights are, however, a far cry from those held in the delta villages and in upper Egypt for centuries. Traditionally, the bride and her guests light candles and place them in a dish containing a mixture of henna and water. Once the henna has fermented, the bride clutches some henna from the plate in her fists and puts it onto her hands and feet, creating somewhat unattractive blotches of colour on her skin. The henna is thought to

bring *haraka* (blessings) and *kheir* (abundance) to the couple. This is why in some parts of Egypt the bridegroom participates in the event and marks his skin with the henna as well.

Henna has been part of wedding celebrations for decades. But it only became the rage for Egypt's elite in the last few years and the practice has caught on rapidly. According to Setouna, who specialises in henna for the rich, several brides a week hold the henna nights. "I myself attend two or three henna nights a week, when times are good," she says. Frequent exhibits of henna being drawn at five-star hotels and cultural gatherings have helped spread the trend.

Henna was known to the Arabs as a cosmetic centuries ago. As one old Arab saying goes: "Henna is the dye for women; blood is the dye for men." This implied that shedding one's blood for a cause is a decoration. According to some, the idea of henna nights originated in Sudan, where it is part of the heritage. "In Sudan, in addition to the eve of their wedding, married women are expected to paint their hands and feet with henna regularly," says Setouna. "This is what distinguishes those who care

for their appearance from those who don't. However, it seems that neither popular traditions of the Delta villages and Upper Egypt nor Sudanese heritage are what prompt Egyptian brides nowadays to hold henna nights.

"Everyone is doing the henna nights because they are fashionable; it has nothing to do with tradition. One person did it and then everyone started to follow suit," says Maha, 24, who has attended several henna nights and plans to hold one herself. "I want to hold one because it's something new, fashionable and a lot of fun."

The henna itself, however, is more often than not imported from Sudan. "We use Sudanese henna because it is pure and of good quality," explains Hanem Daoud, who also paints henna as a hobby. The henna is brought from Sudan and mixed with a number of spices and chemicals, including dye, to give it a pleasant scent, modify its colour and help it to be absorbed by the skin.

The alternative to adding chemicals to the henna is somewhat messy. After the design is drawn and left to set for 10-15 min-

utes it is exposed to smoke. "I burn wood in a metal tin and have the person place their arm or leg (whichever has the design on it) over the tin and then cover it completely with a big cloth," explains Hanem Daoud. This, she claims, is the most natural way to make the henna set well. "However, it is quite inconvenient for brides, especially if they have many friends present who are also going to have designs drawn."

In general, the henna remains for two to three weeks before fading away. When it does start to fade, it can become quite unattractive, which is also why many people have it done in areas which are easily covered. The wrists, hands and ankles are most commonly painted. However, other less visible parts of the body are also fashionable, especially among the brides. Setouna says.

"I had the henna night because all my friends who got married had one and I did it all over my body because my husband and I both like the way the henna looks," says Dalia, 26. But, I did it so that it wouldn't show while I was in my wedding dress, which is what most people do."



photo: Jihan Annan

Mohamed Karima: A star is born

The show must go on, says the last of the real-life piers; but who will get the last laugh?

Mohamed Karima lives in a down-zone, a steady plane where anything can happen but nothing usually does. Every morning he leaves the dark cool of his building, deep within the maze of alleyways around the Mosque of Fatima El-Nabawiya in El-Darb El-Ahmar. With a stage on his back, this salt-of-the-earth puppeteer roams the streets performing for his pay. He's learned not to expect much, and not to bite the hand that feeds him. Most of all, this daily grind has tattooed him with the patience of rocks.

The sun has managed to find its way into the alley, and in its sudden harsh light Mohamed's smile goes lopsided. "I've been waiting here my entire life. Finally, now, I'm going to be a star."

He doesn't really believe this, of course; he's just being optimistic.

His entire life has been a gypsy's blind roaming, and there's nothing in particular he seems to be searching for. His days are spent getting on the bus then off the bus, doing a show in front of someone's balcony, by the statue of Ramsis on Salah Salem near the airport, at a birthday party, or on the streets of Zamalek and Fatma El-Nabawiya as the schools let out. He is constantly being chased by *barabas*, security guards, the police, stray dogs and kids with toy guns.

Hundreds of years ago, Mohamed Karima would have been just another *Aragos*, puppeteer. It was a bigger business then, and competition was cut-throat. To find work or fame, you had to have either the best voice, the most bitter satire or truly brilliant fingers. Today, Mohamed Karima enjoys a unique status — perhaps not as romantic as being a star, but, in the intricate flux of the endlessly raging debate between traditional and modern, Mohamed Karima is an icon, something to grab onto and play, like a pawn or a bishop.

The case of the fast food restaurant versus the *Aragos* makes things more clear. The hamburger giant has a policy banning any outside entertainers from performing at birthday parties being held at the restaurant. When Mohamed was not allowed to put on his act at a five-year-old's recent bash, intense negotiations began which eventually reached the upper echelons of the corporate hierarchy. Fearing a point war pitting Western hegemony against traditional Egyptian culture, a compromise was reached, and Mohamed was allowed to perform in front of the restaurant on Pyramids Road. Not inside, mind you, since that would disturb the customers, but in the courtyard — which actually made the show appear sponsored by the hamburger restaurant chain.

Perhaps the puppeteer is part of a nostalgia revival — something for bored rich kids to laugh and look at for a while from the comfort of their Lazy Boy recliners — pay a hundred pounds and you get to feel like you're part of the general population for a while, re-connected to your heritage via *Aragos*.

Nearly forgotten now are all the old-time entertainers who used to walk the street and perform for a pittance. For centuries, puppet shows were the prime source of entertainment, political satire couched in bright colours and comedy. Then came radio and TV, which provided brighter, more colourful outlets.

These days kids want what they see on the small screen. So it's the Ninja Turtles that get all the birthday party work. "The man is the puppet," as Mohamed Karima says, so the turtles are bound to have more immediate attraction.

Mohamed's comment about the Ninjas also applies to himself. The man makes few distinctions between human and hand-held dolls. The characters in his show are all real. Perhaps he himself is the star of the show, the puppeteer called Napoleon, who spends his days singing and joking, creating a ruckus and getting into fights with the rest of the crew: the guard, the bride-to-be, the dancers and the village headman. Depending on the audience, the show can last ten minutes, or hours on end: Napoleon interacts with each character in turn in a Punch-and-Judy-style mée of jokes, blows and, ultimately, Napoleon is victorious.

But all of that is on-stage. Mohamed is tucked away beneath the curtain, within the comfort of the box, away from the audience's eyes. In real life, he lives with his sisters and a scattering of relatives, distant and near. He's a loner, and his house is a cave. The perfect place to retreat is into the belly of the family, where you don't have to say much. Just a toothless smile and a few choice clichés every once in a while.

Inexplicable illnesses seem to come and



go. Sometimes there's an excuse, which appears made up in the spot. Like when Mohamed refused to perform for eight days after his neighbour, Gad El-Haq Ali Gad El-Haq passed away. Al-Azhar is just down the street, and it would be a sacrilege, said Mohamed, to make people laugh while we mourned the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar.

These blue funks can last for up to six months. They involve not leaving the house, not walking the streets. Once, during just such a down spell, his wife upped and left him. That was decades ago, but Mohamed still seems sad, beaten. Just like that, she went and married someone else.

They were both part of a bohemian, down-and-out crowd of artists and performers. He speaks of the olden days when Boulak was just a bunch of thatched huts and when the area behind El-Mugamma teemed with street performers, making it sound like a fairy tale Indian street. He met his wife, and they eloped, anxious to consummate their marriage. They went to a small village called Bita for their honeymoon and within three days he had set up his stage from their vacation window and put on a show for the locals. Three days later her mother showed up and dragged them back to Cairo, Mohamed wanted to live in El-Darb El-Ahmar, but his wife got sick of it after a while.

"What could I do..." says Mohamed wistfully. "The *isma* [the right to divorce] was in her hand, so I couldn't refuse."

They had a daughter who, now married and with grown kids of her own, lives in Banha. She and her mother go from village to village with a roving amusement park — a clan of travelling swings and rides. It's a leisurely work and they're doing well. They never come to Cairo, and last time Mohamed visited them was six months ago.

He's kept to himself his entire life. Plenty of acquaintances, but not one person he can name as a truly close friend. Someone with whom he'd share his deepest secrets, his triumphs and tragedies. He's hidden himself behind a wall of good cheer, but not many are fooled. The puppet master who has spent his life making thousands — maybe millions — of people happy, is actually a very sad man.

"He's wonderful, he makes me want to cry. Yes, he really does," says the cabaret

dancer to Marcello and his father in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* about the trumpet player whose solo is about to begin. Mohamed Karima inspires that same fine line, a strange, divine state between tears of sadness and joy.

Perhaps it's his face, the deep creases and lines a testament to hard times taken in stride. He looks like a dispossessed baron, or perhaps a nuclear physicist having his hard times (at least while he was wearing the eyeglasses that later turned out to be merely glass, sans prescription. To protect his eyes, Mohamed said.)

Once or twice he's been an extra in movies and TV shows he's never even seen. But Mohamed doesn't allow his thwarted ambition to get the best of him. He knocks on wood, thanks the Lord and keeps a smile on his face. In any other state of mind he probably would never be able to do the only job he knows.

At the country estate where he performed last month, one of the "princesses" being entertained inquired as to whether puppeteering was merely a hobby. It didn't occur to her that it might have been his sole source of income.

All his life, he's been Mister Entertainment. "I'll do all that for you," Mohamed says when asked about all the other performers who traditionally accompanied the puppeteer on rounds through the streets and *mosaids* of times long gone: the fire-eater, the magician, the man who can make you levitate. He's never tried any of these tricks for real but remains fully confident he could do any one of them, because he's always been there, he knows all the secrets, he's part of the inside crowd.

He carries his experiences like war wounds. You can see this in Mohamed's eyes as he performs the second part of his act, making a larger free-form puppet dressed as a bride belly dance to the sounds of Warda and Amr Diab. Without the stage to protect him, both his pain and his versatility really come out. The slightest, deft movements of fingers and wrist and she swings her hips more seductively than Fifi Abdu. After lunch, Mohamed cradles the doll, petting her, talking to her just as though she really was his daughter.

Profile by Tarek Atia



Following the Egyptian-Jordanian summit, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak (left) and Jordanian King Hussein (right) are seen with their wives. The summit was held in Amman, Jordan, and was the first time the two leaders met since the signing of the 1994 peace treaty. The summit was attended by a number of high-ranking officials from both countries.

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Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostri

◆ Question: When are three days one week?
Answer: When they are AUC's Library Week. From 16 until 18 April AUC held stimulating exhibitions, demonstrations, film showings and lectures to encourage reading. As part of the effort, three READ posters were printed, featuring none other than world-renowned author Naguib Mahfouz, internationally acclaimed actor Omar Sharif and sports stars Omar El-Borollosi and Salwa Shabana delving into their favourite reads. Personally, I like to dig into a good book every now and then, although I do believe myself to be much more of a talker than a reader. I've always found the sound of my voice to be quite soothing, and there's something about how quiet it becomes when I'm reading that is rather unnerving.



Tired of writing and acting? Like Naguib Mahfouz and Omar Sharif, you too can take a reading break! Fashion heaven for the fashion conscious by Dior



◆ It's a well-known fact that before Marlene Dietrich, Ava Gardner and Ingrid Bergman could even spell Dior, I was being fitted by that glorious house of fashion. It was last week in the Ramses Ballroom of the Ramses Hilton that I relived those glorious days, during a gala soiree paying homage to these divas, and featuring Christian Dior's Spring/Summer '96 collection by

Gianfranco Ferré in its first ever fashion show in Egypt. The profits from the event went to the Egyptian Association for the Mentally Handicapped, "The Right To Live", while I, throughout the whole evening, along with actresses Youssra and Nabila Ebeid and fashion designer Hanaa El-Shaffie, exercised to the limits our right to scream with glee and delight.

هكذا من الإيجل